

An exploration of how word choice and framing contribute to agenda-setting in the reporting of gender-based violence in three KwaZulu-Natal community newspapers (November 2021 to December 2022)

A dissertation submitted to the Department of Media & Cultural Studies in the School of Arts, College of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu Natal in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Media & Cultural Studies.

by

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Abstract

This study primarily concerns how word choice and framing contribute to agenda-setting in reporting gender-based violence (GBV) in three KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) community newspapers from November 2021 to December 2022. Three weekly English community newspapers, namely, *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun*, were purposively selected and provided the data for this study. The key objectives of this study were to look at descriptive and emotive words used in the GBV-related articles posted by the three publications; to determine if any changes occurred in the framing of articles during the 16 Days of Activism campaign period of November to December 2021 and November to December 2022, and to determine how word choice and framing prioritised the issue of GBV in terms of the media agenda setting.

This study was guided by framing theory. A mixed-method research approach was used to collect and analyse the data. Quantitative content analysis was used to tally all GBV-related stories published during the period of study and to record all descriptive and emotive words used in these stories. Qualitative thematic analysis was used to group these words according to similarities and connotations to identify emerging themes on GBV. Because GBV is an issue that comes out of the private into the public sphere through being reported in community newspapers and other media platforms, it is important for this study to look at word choice and framing and, for this reason, initiate future debate on media responsibility when reporting on GBV.

Looking at national stats-to-story-frequency and priority ratio, findings indicate that GBV was not given priority in the publications under review. Overall, 42% of all the GBV-related stories discussed in this study were posted during the two 16 Days of Activism time periods discussed. This indicates an outstanding visibility of GBV-related stories compared to the rest of the study period. Lastly, literature on GBV and the media in South Africa is very broad, but the study of word choice in the media, especially community newspapers in South Africa is yet to be thoroughly explored through research. This study acknowledges literature on analysing discourse around GBV in the South African media, that has been done by scholars such as Kulne Oparinde & Rachel Matteau Matsha, Floretta Boonzaier, Peace Kiguwa, Nechama Broodie, Amanda Gouws, Nicky Falkof and Mille Phiri, just to mention a few. The study of word choice needs attention as it is critical in understanding, significantly reducing and possibly eradicating GBV. This study suggests that the three publications need to increase the salience of GBV stories by dedicating more space to such stories weekly. Equivalency framing in the use of descriptive and emotive words is encouraged, as they are eye-catching, appealing and interesting to the readers.

Keywords: community newspapers, gender-based violence, framing, agenda-setting, word choice, 16 Days of Activism, South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal.

Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, in the department of Media & Cultural Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

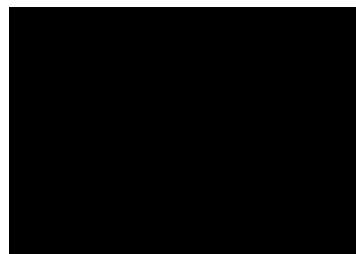
I, Munyaradzi Mangoro (216076626), declare that:

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18 DECEMBER 2023

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Ngiyabonga Dr.

List of Acronyms

AFP	Agence France-Presse
AIP	Association of Independent Publishers
ATU	Amanzimtoti Trauma Unit
CWGL	Centre of Women's Global Leadership
CSVR	Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
DV	Domestic Violence
DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
FAMSA	Family and Marriage Society of South Africa
GMMP	Global Media Monitoring Project
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HRC	Human Rights Commission
IWMF	International Women's Media Foundation
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IOL	Independent Online
ME	Maritzburg Echo
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NSP-GBVF	National Strategic Plan-Gender Based Violence-Femicide
RSACC	Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre
SAMRC	South African Medical Research Council
SAPS	South African Police Services
SCS	South Coast Sun
SLFP	Student Leadership Fellowship Program
SONA	State of the Nation Address
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls

WACC	World Association of Christian Communication
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZO	Zululand Observer

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

“The unacceptably high levels of gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa are a blight on our national conscience, and a betrayal of our constitutional order for which so many fought, and for which so many gave their lives”.

- President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, 2020

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women cited in the Council of Europe (2023), defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”. Gender-based violence (GBV) is the general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with each gender, as well as the unequal power relationships between the genders within the context of a specific society (Bloom, 2008: 14). Because community newspapers are traditionally mandated to serve the communities in which they are located by providing information on key issues and reflecting the experiences of the community, they are ideally placed to raise awareness of gender-based violence and its effects. This study, therefore, explores the framing and word choice used in 145 GBV-related stories published in the *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and the *South Coast Sun* during the period of study from November 2021 to December 2022 to see how these factors contribute to making GBV salient.

Background Of Study

Gender-based violence is a global public health issue (World Health Organisation, 2021), and a gross violation of human rights (Durham, 2020) which has risen to unacceptably high levels in South Africa since its attaining of independence in 1994, and is continuing unabated. Statistics show that a woman is murdered every three hours in South Africa, at least 150 women are raped every day, with an overall conviction rate of between 4 to 8% of the reported cases, and one in every four South African women will experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime (Grocott’s Mail, 2022; CSV, 2017; Africa Check, 2020). Among

the top thirty leading GBV hotspots in South Africa in 2020, KwaZulu-Natal has nine areas identified as hotspots, such as Umlazi, Empangeni, Eshowe, Inanda, KwaDukuza, Plessislaer, KwaMashu, Ntuzuma, and Osizweni (News24, 2020). This forms the background of this dissertation on exploring how word choice contributes to framing and agenda-setting in the reporting of GBV in KwaZulu-Natal community newspapers.

GBV In South Africa

Cited as the “rape capital of the world”, South Africa continues to grapple with alarming rates of domestic abuse, sexual violence and femicide (Mail & Guardian, 2022). Premised by the National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence and Femicide 2020-2030, the vision is to realise a South Africa free from gender-based violence directed at women, children and LGBTQIA+ persons (NSP-GBVF, 2020-2030). Most GBV cases are located within the family structure or intimate relationships. Factors that lead to the perpetuation of GBV include gendered power inequality rooted in patriarchy as the key primary driver of GBV in South Africa, social norms-cultural or religious, low levels of women empowerment, lack of social support, socio-economic inequality and substance abuse (Saferspaces, 2023).

Before reporting a GBV case to the police, most of the survivors have to overcome these predominant gender norms as in most communities, GBV is viewed as a private matter and not as a crime, which dissuades other community members from interfering, and this contributes to the normalisation and persistence of gender-based violence. This sentiment is supported by the alarming withdrawal rates of GBV-related cases reported to the police by victims (News24, 2022). The normalisation of GBV in many cultures, as violence that occurs in private spaces, is heightened by a lack of understanding of the consequences of GBV by the perpetrators. A lack of information on GBV has made this scourge socially acceptable, posing serious challenges to addressing it effectively. The media should play its role, of informing and educating the communities they serve on gender-based violence, more effectively.

Addressing delegates during a briefing to mark the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in June 2020, social development minister Lindiwe Zulu said, “the names of victims of gender-based violence in South Africa read like a casualty list of a war zone (Ngatane, 2020). The percentage of households that reported all or some sexual offences to

the police increased from 88.7% in 2020/21 to 90% in 2021/22 (Stats Sa, 2022). With more than 50 000 cases of GBV and femicide being reported annually (Maine, 2023), key legal reforms such as, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences & Related Matters) Amendment Act Amendment Bill, the Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Bill, and the Domestic Violence Amendment Bill were assented to laws by the president of South Africa in 2022 to strengthen the fight against GBV (South African Government, 2022). Despite such efforts by the government, a huge gap between theory and practice still exists. Instead of these laws helping to reduce GBV cases, the numbers are increasing alarmingly. In 2022 the country experienced some horrific and gruesome femicide cases such as of four-year-old Bokgabo Poo, who was kidnapped, raped, murdered and mutilated; Namhla Mtwla, who was shot nine times (The Citizen, 2022); and two grade twelve students, Amanda Zulu and Minenhle Buthelezi, who were hacked to death and their bodies dismembered in their rented student accommodation in Ngwangwane village in Creighton KwaZulu-Natal (Eyewitness News, 2022; IOL, 2022).

Research Problem

One of the many challenges that South Africa and many other countries around the world face daily is that of gender-based violence. Existing structural and patriarchal conditions deny women and girls the ability to control practices that increase their vulnerability to gender-based violence. One of the key areas that needs scrutiny is the use of language in everyday communication on GBV, and the word choice used to illustrate GBV incidents in the media, especially community newspapers. In this context, looking at the province of KwaZulu-Natal, which has nine places identified among the top 30 GBV hotspots in South Africa, it is therefore important to explore how word choice and framing contributes to agenda-setting in the reporting of GBV in KZN community newspapers.

Research aims and objectives

The primary aim of this study is to explore how word choice and framing contribute to agenda-setting in the reporting of GBV by looking at some of the community newspapers circulated in nine areas identified as GBV hotspots in the province of KZN. Furthermore, a look at the concept of the 16 Days of Activism campaign is necessary to enhance knowledge of how the community newspapers under consideration pay attention to the issue of GBV

during the campaign period. To achieve this, the following are the questions that the research is asking:

1. How are GBV articles framed in three KZN community newspapers?
2. What type of descriptive and emotive words are used in the reporting of GBV?
3. What changes occurred in the framing and word choice in articles on GBV during the 16 Days of Activism campaign period of November to December 2021 and November to December 2022?

Over the past years, several researchers and organisations have taken the initiative to study GBV in South Africa and the world at large, to better understand the phenomenon and suggest possible and practical ways to change the rates of GBV and the culture of impunity surrounding it, to ensure it is no longer a national trend in South Africa.

Literature Review

After going through several organisations' databases, google scholar and other scholarly articles, searching through a broad swath of literature at the conception of this study, it was noted that no South African-based literature on the use of language and word choice in the reporting of GBV in community newspapers had been carried out before. Across the available literature, several terms have been used interchangeably to describe the phenomenon under study. Terms such as violence against women and girls (VAWG), domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) have been used to refer to gender-related abuse.

However, as mentioned in the introduction, this study will employ gender-based violence (GBV) as the most comprehensive lexis to refer to the abuse of women and girls because of their gender.

Several international literature studies on media coverage of domestic violence and intimate partner violence have been conducted by researchers such as Bullock & Cubert (2002); Bullock (2007); Meyers (1996, 1997); and Carlyle et al. (2008). In the South African context, several studies have investigated GBV, such as Buiten & Salo (2007); Shefer (2013), Van Niekerk (2015); Jewkes et al., (2011); Seedat et al., (2009); Lewin et al., (2013); Gqola (2007); and Watson & Lalu (2015). In Chapter Two, this study will further contribute to the existing literature on GBV by considering the 16 Days of Activism campaign and the role of community newspapers in the reporting of GBV.

After the Kopanong Declaration of 1998 to end GBV, South Africa joined the 16 Days of Activism movement observed globally from the 25th of November to the 10th of December annually. The campaign is a call for the prevention of and elimination of violence against women and girls. It challenges the silence and impunity surrounding sexual and gender-based violence worldwide (IPPF, 2021). In South Africa, every year, the government kicks-off the campaign under a theme that responds to the realities of GBV, takes stock of gaps and successes in the battle against GBV and focuses on how the nation moves forward amid the rising numbers of GBV.

Despite the campaign being designed to raise awareness of GBV, it has been critiqued for not including the media, such as community newspapers, as an effective tool to circulate information on GBV. The campaign is therefore cited as having little or no impact on women living under the poverty line and in poor communities around the country. Having said this, the study will take stock of the 16 Days of Activism campaign periods of November to December 2021 and November to December 2022, to assess the reporting patterns during the two time periods. A concern noted during this study is that no literature specific to the South African context has been carried out to measure the proliferation and publishing of GBV-related content in the media during the campaign period.

Literature on the roles of community newspapers in South Africa and how they report on GBV is an area that needs attention, as no related literature was found during the commencing of this study. Researchers such as Martin & Copeland (2003); Milne et al., (2006); Carpenter-Frank (2015) and Saving Community Journalism (2015) carried out studies highlighting the roles and importance of community newspapers. Though community newspapers have a narrower mission than provincial or national newspapers, they play a pivotal role in serving a targeted audience by covering issues that are area specific and relevant to their communities (Saving Community Journalism, 2015).

Community newspapers promote the interests and well-being of their communities (Carpenter-Frank, 2015). With culture and patriarchal practices being dominant in communities served by the three community newspapers under study, it is interesting to see how these newspapers balance their civil duty of correctly and accurately reporting on GBV, which is also viewed as a private matter. According to Martin & Copeland (2003),

community newspapers are tools for shaping thought, i.e., the way a message is framed through the use of specified words sets the agenda on how the community views and talks about the issue published, as one of the principles of community newspapers is to stimulate dialogue amongst community members (Milne et al., 2006).

Theoretical Frameworks

From a social constructionist perspective, newspaper content reflects how journalists and news organisations work within and interact with the greater social structure (Demers, 1996). The study employs a combination of several relevant theories as conceptual frameworks to explore word choice, framing and agenda-setting in the coverage of GBV in three KwaZulu-Natal community newspapers. Key theories such as framing, agenda-setting, news and news values, representation, etic/emic approach, and language are used in conducting this study. All these theories are relevant to this study because they are the idea behind every news story, i.e., from the thought process, to the conception of the news story until the final news article is presented to the readers. The following discussion will briefly define some of the theories mentioned above, while all of these theories will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

News and news values

This concept helps the research to look at news within the bigger framework of how knowledge is produced. This helps in assessing the quality of news through news values such as impact, human interest and relevancy, and also helps understand key theories such as framing and agenda-setting. According to Tuchman (1989), at the core of news production is the theorisation of news which considers how media power works within the broader social context. News theorisation helps understand news, news values, news selection, and the reasoning behind journalists' and editors' preference of using particular word choices when presenting social issues such as GBV. Zaller (2003) emphasises that news should provide citizens with the basic information necessary to form and update opinions on all major issues of the day. Because community newspapers approach news values grounded on the audience-oriented approach, it was, therefore, important to conduct this study to look at how news on topical issues such as GBV are framed in community newspapers as a media form serving societies that are regarded as highly patriarchal and consider GBV as a private matter, hence studying word choices on GBV is essential.

Representation

Representation as a concept used in this study is looked at through the lens of the production of meaning through language, which always involves the construction of reality and how certain word choices create reality and normalise specific worldviews or ideologies. The media plays a critical role in defining how audiences understand an issue of public concern such as GBV. As such, messages carried in newspaper stories are understood as influenced by the larger social structures. Representations refer to the construction of aspects of reality in any medium, especially mass media, such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities, and other abstract concepts (Chandler, 2006). Quantitative content analysis was used as the first method of formal analysis of representation to quantify the actual number of GBV-related stories posted by the three community newspapers being looked at and to identify certain words within the stories on gender-based violence. The media's power to steer attention to and from public issues such as GBV often determines which problems society will tackle or ignore.

Agenda-setting

Agenda-setting theory looks at story selection and emphasises the power of the media in setting the public agenda on what to talk about. Agenda-setting involves the media deciding and determining the importance of a story and which stories to include in their publications. Through agenda-setting, the media communicate to the public what issues are the most important at a particular time. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), agenda-setting is how the media influences the importance of topics on the public agenda. This means the media has the power to shape the public perception of events such as GBV.

The agenda-setting theory explores how the views and thoughts of the public can be altered by what they see, hear or read in the media. The theory is therefore intertwined with framing, representation, news values and language use. In crafting the message, agenda-setting also outlines the bias involved in reporting events such as GBV in the media. The increased salience of a topic or issue in the mass media influences the salience of that issue among the public, which means agenda-setting sets the tone amongst the public on what issues to discuss and regard as important.

Framing theory

The most basic media framing question is whether the issue of interest is covered sufficiently. The three community newspapers under discussion posted 145 GBV-related stories during the period under study from November 2021 to December 2022, against the backdrop of 52 516 GBV-related cases being reported to the SAPS (Crime Stats SA, 2015-2023). Pan & Kosicki (1993:57) noted that framing “may be studied as a strategy of constructing and processing news discourse or as a characteristic of discourse itself”. According to Entman (1991), framing can be shaped by word choice, and studies have supported the idea that framing can affect how individuals think about social and political issues (Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997).

Through the day-to-day selection and display of the news, the editors of newspapers exert a powerful influence on public attention to the issues, problems, and opportunities that confront each community (McCombs, 1997:433). Editorial decisions about which news stories to report, which terms or word choices to use in those news stories, which characteristics of a person or attributes of an issue to highlight, and what social values to address can all impact the audience’s way of thinking and reasoning (Ben-Porath, 2009:620). This study uses framing as a key theoretical approach in exploring the factors contributing to agenda-setting in reporting gender-based violence in KwaZulu-Natal community newspapers.

Language as a frame

Language plays a very influential role in the socialisation process in which individuals are taught roles, rules and expectations or values that society assigns to a particular social standing (Ore, 2003). Language as a medium of interaction in which social norms are transmitted helps individuals and societies shape reality on a given issue and reinforces individual perceptions. This study explores how language helps frame GBV in a certain way that may limit the other possible ways it can be viewed or understood. According to Kramsch (2003), this particular use of language forces people to think within the limits of a certain syntax because it gives them the words to do so within these limits. The idea behind choosing language as a theoretical framework is based on the premise that language shapes reality, communicates a particular viewpoint, and influences how people view and understand social issues such as GBV. Easta et al. (2012) pointed out that the choice of words used to communicate a particular viewpoint may enhance or minimise the acts of GBV, contributing to a misconception of the crime committed, its gravity and the proper labelling of such acts.

Global Citizen (2020) echoed Easta's position by emphasising the need to use correct, accurate and sensitive language when reporting on GBV to educate the public and raise awareness on such issues properly. The theory of language lays open how language influences the formation of reality by creating the lens that helps the readers comprehend GBV hence it is an important framework for this study.

Lastly, having briefly elaborated on some of the theories used in this study, it is important to highlight that agenda-setting is linked to gatekeeping, which controls the selection of content published in community newspapers. Therefore, it directly impacts framing, language and word choice. Framing asks how issues such as GBV are represented to the audience, who may interpret the message in various ways (Altheide, 1997). Framing and representation are closely linked to agenda-setting as they describe how angles, such as word choice, highlight certain aspects of the story. This means the framing and representation of GBV through the use of particular language sets the tone and agenda on what the readers openly discuss on GBV, in public places or private spaces.

Research Design And Methodology

Chapter Four of the study discusses the research design, methodology, sampling plan, data generation, and analysis methods used to answer the research question effectively. The study is located within the social constructivism paradigm. According to Perdana (2017), constructivism describes social behaviours and media as an intersubjective sphere that can affect and shape individuals' or communities' social identities and norms rather than directly influencing their behaviour. Thompson (2019) stressed that constructivism explores the construction of reality through language, communication, media, culture and society, an approach this study is undertaking. Because GBV is a serious social problem in South Africa, it is important to explore how word choice and framing contribute to agenda-setting in reporting GBV-related stories in the selected KZN community newspapers.

The preferred sampling method for this study was purposive sampling because it allowed the researcher discretion to select suitable publications, e.g., allowing the selection of only English publications circulated in or close to the nine areas identified as GBV hotspots in the province of KZN. The final sample was comprised of three community newspapers namely *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and the *South Coast Sun*, circulated in or around GBV

hotspots such as Empangeni, Eshowe, Ntuzuma, Umlazi, KwaMashu, Inanda, KwaDukuza, Plessislaer and Osizweni respectively.

A mixed research approach was used in this study because it offered enormous potential for generating new ways of understanding the complexities and contexts of social experience and enhancing our capacities for social explanation and generalisation (Mason, 2006). Creswell (2012) explains the mixed research approach as a combination and integration of qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study for the broader purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. Therefore, mixed research methods were essential for this study because, according to Fetters & Freshwater (2015), integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches permits a complete and more synergistic utilisation of data in providing a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone.

Quantitative content analysis was used as the primary method of analysis to tally all the GBV-related stories posted from November 2021 to December 2022, determine the frequency of publications, and identify the descriptive and emotive words used in all the GBV-related stories. According to Krippendorff (1980), content analysis is the preferred method for exploring and examining specific content prevalent in the media. Qualitative thematic analysis was used as the secondary analysis method to look at these word choices and frames used and to create relevant themes on GBV based on the identified words being grouped according to similarities and connotations. In other words, the result from the quantitative approach were used to develop the qualitative approach.

Relevance Of The Topic

Many articles on GBV in South Africa and worldwide exist on several platforms, such as organisational and medical websites, Google Scholar, Sabinet, and Ebscohost. However, no study that specifically focuses on the use of language and word choice in South African community newspapers was found during the commencement of this study. Therefore it is important to the researcher that information generated from this study would add to the understanding of the phenomenon being studied and will open paths for similar studies and further in-depth studies on the use and impact of language and word choice in the reporting of GBV especially in community newspapers in South Africa and across the world.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Introduction introduces the research and provides a framework for the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review explores key ideas anchoring the study by consulting and examining past and current literature on GBV in South Africa, the 16 Days of Activism campaign and government and civil society response to GBV, and gender-based violence in the South African media. The chapter also critically analyses the role of community newspapers in fighting GBV.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework presents the key theoretical departure points for the study by exploring theories such as news and news values, representation in news media, agenda-setting, framing, etic/emic and language as a frame of GBV in the media.

Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology outlines the mixed method approach used, i.e., combining the quantitative content analysis as the primary method and qualitative thematic analysis as the secondary method. The sampling plan applied to this study is also discussed.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis and Discussion discusses word choice, themes, and the framing of GBV in the news, and a discussion of articles published during the 16 Days of Activism campaigns of 2021 and 2022 is looked at.

Chapter Six: Findings and Conclusions details the research findings in response to the research objectives, draws conclusions from the data collected, and links the overall findings to reporting GBV in the community newspapers.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The introductory chapter to this study discussed the orientation of the study and provided a background on gender-based violence. This chapter will examine available literature on GBV, to help unpack how GBV was reported in KwaZulu-Natal community newspapers from November 2021 to December 2022. Drawing from different contexts, focusing on GBV in South Africa, this chapter discusses numerous perspectives to understand better the GBV phenomenon and how it is reported in the media, focusing on how word choice and framing contribute to agenda-setting in KZN community newspaper reports. According to Strodthoff et al., (1985); Salwen (1988), gender-based violence is accepted as an area requiring public concern now; how much, to what extent it is to be reported, and, more particularly, how it is to be reported remain matters of debate. This chapter will discuss: GBV in South Africa; GBV and the South African media; Community newspapers and the reporting of GBV; and the 16 Days of Activism: Government's and civil society's response to GBV.

Gender-Based Violence In South Africa

Violence and violent crimes have always been a part of South African history (Stevens, 2009); hence, societal issues such as GBV continue unabated in contemporary South African society. Gqola (2007:118) argues that gender-based violence in South Africa is omnipresent, commonplace, and normalised through the dominant public discourse. Gender-based violence and violence in general in South Africa are irrefutably linked to, and are believed to be driven by 'issues' such as the country's violent history of apartheid, high rates of unemployment, poverty, inequality, and the socio-political situation in the country.

Minisini (2021) argues that "domestic violence and GBV in South Africa are culturally deep rooted and can be traced to the apartheid era. South Africa's apartheid history is perhaps at its utmost harmful, and most, noticeable, in the legacy of violence that its citizens continue to embody in their everyday life". A fragile social cohesion and trauma inherited from the past

exacerbate social ills such as GBV in South Africa. If the high rates of GBV are attributed to past traumas, it means the country has not moved on as perceived by many, and there is a danger of retrogressing to that society where violence is admissible and used as a tool of control.

For the past decade, South Africa has been experiencing an upward trajectory in protests by women mobilised by gender-based violence more than service delivery, political or economic issues. This is as women try to voice their outrage over the unprecedented levels of sexual violence, femicide, lack of safety, and the sexualisation of women and girls. It is no doubt that in South African society, it is becoming extremely difficult to be a woman; in a society that has normalised gender-based violence and GBV acts such as cat-calling, sexual assault, rape, femicide and the marginalisation of women by men. Protests have become the most effective way for oppressed and silenced women's voices to be heard, and for the government and the media to pay attention to the plight of women over gender-based violence and abuse.

To a greater extent, most women in poor, rural communities and townships have also come to normalise these abusive behaviours by 'sucking' it up because of how the society itself is designed. A society in which men as perpetrators are always getting away with these crimes has become a normality and a part of everyday life. The media and news coverage are finding it difficult to cover these crimes extensively and objectively because of the power relations at play (Ross, 2019). According to Gouws (2017), what this means is that without political will, a change in the sensationalism and narratives around the reporting of gender-based violence and men's greater involvement as allies with women when it comes to gender-based violence, nothing will change. Because of this, women are less confident to say "no" to such abuse, speak up for themselves, or speak their mind, especially in private, family and traditional settings, where it is considered taboo for women to report abuse by men.

South African men are highly competitive about power, respect and status and they are seen as opposed to changing gender power relations and the transformation of boys, men and masculinities in post-apartheid society (Ratele, 2014). The high unemployment rates, patriarchal tendencies and poverty have become an obstacle to achieving the so-called 'male status', which could result in feelings of shame, humiliation and being seen as a failure in society. Lewin et al. (2013) state that violent punishment of people who transgress heteronormative gender roles and identities is a critical

concern in South Africa. Seedat et al. (2009) believe violence has become a means of achieving wellbeing, status and respect. A cross-sectional study of two South African districts, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, discovered that 27.6% of all men had raped a woman or girl. Of all the men interviewed, 42,4% admitted being physically violent to an intimate partner (Jewkes et al., 2011).

According to a Stats SA (2020) report, the prevalence of GBV is as low as 2% among the wealthy quantile, comprising mainly whites and Indians. An overall 4% of them have ever experienced GBV compared to 29% of the lowest wealth quantile, comprising mainly blacks, having experienced GBV. A survey by Stats SA for the period 2015/16 published in 2018 revealed that the provinces with the highest headcount of adult poverty are Limpopo (67,5%), Eastern Cape (67,3%), KwaZulu-Natal (60,7%) and North-West (59,6%). For these four provinces, significantly more than half of their population lives in poverty. Gauteng and Western Cape have the lowest proportion of adults living in poverty at 29,3% and 33,2%, respectively (Stats SA, 2018). In general, 81% of the population in South Africa are black people (Mail & Guardian, 2022). Most of them are from a disadvantaged background, and there is a connection between race, poverty and deprivation, and high GBV prevalence among the poor; hence the GBV prevalence is high among the poor.

The widespread material deprivation in South Africa, coupled with rising expectations caused by ostentatious displays of wealth, has also proved disastrous for fostering the growth of violent masculinities (Morrell, 2001). The context of material deficiency caused by high unemployment rates exacerbates GBV in South Africa. Ncwane (2021) believes that in most cases, women in South Africa have no say regarding issues about their bodies and would tolerate various forms of abuse and do anything to survive because they are poor and dependent on their abusers.

Violence, which underpins dominant customs of manhood and patriarchal social power has significant consequences for all South Africans, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation. For most men, being unable to provide economically is linked to GBV, domestic violence and intimate partner violence. For women, on the other hand, the link between poverty and food insecurities make them more vulnerable to this form of violence. There are higher chances of violence between partners when there's a conflict about the lack of money or food (PLOS One, 2020).

Overall, for the period of study from November 2021 to December 2022, a total number of 52 516 sexual offences cases were recorded in South Africa i.e., 41 579 rape cases, 7 869 sexual assault cases, 1 985 attempted sexual offences, and 1 083 contact sexual offences cases were registered by the South African Police Services (Crime Stats SA, 2015-2023). The above statistics reveal that rape and sexual assault alone contribute to 93,3% of the sexual offences. The number of rape cases recorded from November 2021 to December 2022 also translates to an average of at least 119 rapes committed daily.

The province being looked at by this research, KwaZulu-Natal, has been dubbed the ‘rape capital’ of South Africa during the period of study. Amongst the 30 officially publicised GBV hotspots in South Africa, KZN has the highest number of places identified namely; Inanda, KwaMashu, Osizweni, Ntuzuma, Plessislaer, Eshowe, KwaDukuza, Empangeni and Umlazi, which recorded unprecedented numbers of sexual offences cases such as rape, sexual assault, attempted sexual offences, contact sexual offences and femicide. It is important to note that all these places mentioned are situated in the so-called ‘black townships’, which are synonymous with overcrowding, poor and squalid living conditions, poor service delivery and economic development, high rates of unemployment and substance abuse, which are also viewed as notable contributors to the high levels of gender-based violence. It is also imperative to note that the places mentioned as GBV hotspots, also feature highly in other crime categories from 2021 to 2022.

Gender-Based Violence And The South African Media

Spies (2020) noted that media reporting on intimate femicide clearly illustrates how the murder of women by their intimate partners is framed as isolated incidences rather than a systematic problem within the social context of male dominance. Meyers (1997) points to the tendency of some media reports on individual incidences of GBV as aberrations or the product of individual pathology, rather than the logical result of the systematic oppression of women. Sutherland et al., (2019) echoed that, media reporting is an important indicator of community attitudes and beliefs about violence against women and thus a critical site through which to measure progress towards shifting social norms that reinforce or exacerbate it. According to Silima (2019), the media is key in shaping how people think, and how it reports on issues of femicide impacts how society deals with it. Buiten & Salo (2007) problematise the reporting of GBV in the South African media because they believe news reports shift

away from misogynistic acts of violence by perpetrators towards a problematisation of the spaces and immediate circumstances in which the violence occurs. In a research on media reporting on gender-based violence against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jukic (2016) pointed that the media do not initiate the topic of violence against women but rather they report on it by way of short news once they get the information from their source, most frequently police sources or non-governmental organizations. Jukic further pointed out that “results of the study show that the issue of violence against women as a topic is not given enough coverage in the media since longer forms or forms that provide for a deeper insight into the topic (such as interviews or comments) are rare”.

According to Boonzaier (2017) the representations of gendered and sexual violence, its perniciousness and its persistence need to be traced historically, not just the recent history of apartheid but to a longer colonial history, which has continued relevance for the ways in which bodies and subjectivities are coded. The prevalence of gender-based violence in South Africa shows the enduring legacy of coloniality, and the media as a socio-political tool is complicit in constructing, subtly promoting and abetting gendered violence, and making it meaningful in our collective consciousness. With 42% of men in South Africa having admitted to perpetrating some kind of violence against a woman partner, and almost one in three men admitting to having raped a woman or a girl (Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morell & Dunkle, 2011), surely there should be an increased awareness and visibility of GBV stories in the South African media. How the violation of women and femicide cases enters the public domain and consciousness through media reports sometimes lacks sensitivity and respect, and this speaks to how we choose to understand gender-based violence in South Africa.

Gqola (2015) found the existence of and continuation of colonial discourse in media reporting on GBV in South Africa. The rationale of this study is therefore to give insights into how gender-based violence is reported in the South African media, specifically community newspapers, by illustrating how representations through word choice, language and framing for agenda-setting could be biased towards the longstanding colonial discourses. The study will also examine how language is deployed to construct particular subjects such as victims or survivors of GBV and authorities, and how these may be heavily invested in power relations.

Whilst we cannot shy away from the history of apartheid, its legacies have frequently been used as an explanatory frame for gender-based violence in South Africa, and there is growing recognition of this explanation, at the same time it perpetuates stereotypical ideas about where violence is located (Shefer, 2016). However, at this juncture, it is important to highlight that, 29 years into democracy this narrative needs to be re-examined because we cannot continue blaming apartheid for the current perpetration and trends of gender-based violence. The media's response to gender-based violence can potentially convey implicit messages that might perpetuate or legitimise the violence it is intended to challenge (Shefer, 2013). Interrogating media discourses on violence against women has much to tell us about how such violence is made meaningful in our collective consciousness.

Some media reports and research explore poverty and unemployment as major risk factors for violence. This works to locate violence in particular communities already 'othered', that is poor, rural communities and townships. Such a sentiment implies that gender-based violence is predominantly a 'black experience' as suggested by Bent-Goodley (2009) who said, "GBV has been particularly harmful within the communities of African ancestry even though no segments of society are immune from the vestiges of this problem". There is also a recognition that different spaces produce hegemonic masculinities related to the intersection of identities and inequalities (Vetten & Ratele, 2013). In relation to the role of the media in propagating hegemonic masculinities, WACC (2010) highlighted that only 24% of news subjects are women, 76% are men. Representation of gender in news associated with relationships of dominance and subordination: whereas men are represented as sportsmen, politicians and businessmen, women are represented as vox populi-that is to say, they use to be associated to the lack of status and power. Vega Montiel (2013) also highlighted that, news reports on violence of gender tend to represent women as victims-associated to their lack of power-or, conversely, as those responsible for the violence of which they are victims, aggressors are not part of news reports.

According to Van Niekerk (2015), research on media representations is important especially for social problems such as gendered violence as it both draws upon and shapes public discourse. Media reporting on GBV also has the potential to either reproduce or challenge existing stereotypes and may shape policy and legal opinion (O'Hara, 2012). Without any doubt, gender-based violence is the harsh reality of the social problems facing South Africa,

which affects every race though in different proportions as it decreases with the wealth quantile (Stats SA, 2020).

Watson & Lalu (2015) are of the view that the media in South Africa has a tendency of relating gender-based violence to social problems faced by the predominantly black citizens and is linked to alcohol and drug abuse, poverty, and unemployment, which could be a misdirected response as this serves to depoliticise the violence women and girls are subjected to daily. However, this is not inherently correct since poverty and unemployment are very political issues, and substance abuse in economically depressed and marginalised communities can also be linked to political issues as well. To explicitly link gender-based violence to social problems, the media excludes other factors such as sexism and misogyny. Sexual crimes such as 'acquaintance rape' are hardly considered newsworthy or gain any traction in the South African media, especially when such cases occur in rural, poor areas or townships. For such stories from marginalised communities to be considered newsworthy, they are expected to garner sympathy because the victim will be deemed as deserving and therefore relatable to the intended audience (Lloyd & Ramon, 2017). Because of geographical positioning and the social status of majority of the GBV victims/survivors, their stories may not reach the public domain or considered as mainstream news, hence community newspapers need to play a pivotal role in bringing to light such cases.

Another prevalent frame in the South African media is the construction of gender-based violence on a racial basis, that is as a poor black people's problem. Contemporary South African media representations of GBV continue to draw on apartheid notions of racializing and reporting gendered violence. This is usually evidenced by the obsessive focus and clinical dissection of the bodies of dead black or coloured women, for example, Anene Boysen's murder in 2013 and Karabo Mokoena in 2017, were devoid of contextual analysis. Apartheid notions of misrepresentations of Africans, especially women's bodies, continue to persist in the post-colonial period ensuring that 'controls' remain in place to police their 'sexualised, degenerate, and illegitimate' presence in the public and private spaces (Lewis, 2011). Attention is also put on the poor black men, referring to them as 'barbaric' and constructing the problem of gender-based violence in dispossessed communities (Boonzaier, 2017).

Such media discourses work to reproduce knowledge that resonates with colonial ideology justifying domination and continued subordination of the previously colonised and their descendants (Phoenix, 2009). Given the important role of media in shaping public discourses through either reinforcing or challenging existing stereotypes, the repetition of reporting that reinforces apartheid discourses of blackness, black femininity, and the erasure of subjectivity, in particular, is of serious concern. Dignity should be accorded to victims of gender-based violence, and sensitivity and respect for their lives and subjectivities should be demonstrated as an ethical responsibility in media reporting on GBV.

The media reporting on GBV is guided by the policy frameworks put in place by the government and media houses. For reporters to report effectively and correctly, they need to understand the legal framework governing GBV, for example, how to classify a gender-based crime, which will help in correctly naming, explaining and reporting on the crime. In concluding the discussion on South African media on the reporting of GBV, it is obvious that news is constantly linked to gender and power. Media houses across the world need to work on, and improve the quality of reports on GBV and also give it enough coverage in order to make a significant impact in raising awareness on this problematic social issue.

What is known about gender-based violence in South Africa

The rape and abuse of women in public and private spaces, corrective rape, torture and murder of lesbians in South Africa are well-documented issues (Gaitho, 2021), yet this is hardly mentioned in discussions of GBV by the political leadership and the print media. Conceivably, much of the outbursts around gender-based violence are pointed towards black men, particularly poor black men, while failing to appropriately address the problem of violent masculinities and how gender identity is interconnected with class, ethnicity, race and sexuality. Not addressing gender identity, power, and violence foregrounds the extent to which South Africans, including the political gentry, are unwilling, or hesitant to link masculinity and violence (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012).

For example, in February 2008, a woman was attacked at Noord Street taxi rank in Gauteng when taxi drivers took offence that she was wearing a mini-skirt. They stripped off her clothes and poured alcohol over her while sexually and verbally assaulting her (Sapa, 2008a). Journalists interviewing people at the rank after the incident found that some men and women agreed with the principle that it was inappropriate for the young woman to wear a mini-skirt

because she was abusing men by appearing ‘half-naked’ in public. Another man said, “Women should not wear short skirts because this arouses men, which will lead to rape and other crimes against women”.

This was a clear display of patriarchal behaviour, violent and toxic masculinity, and the reluctance of the government and the lack of political will to challenge and condemn such behaviour, especially the lack of a swift response by law enforcement agents since the incidence happened in a public space, with a police station being a stone throw away from the crime scene. According to a news report by APF (2008), police and security guards claimed, “they were unaware and unable to help the young girl at Noord from being molested”. Sonke Gender Justice's (2008) report on the same incident highlighted that:

witnesses and security guards did nothing to help the woman, and some indicated that there was no point calling the police as they have not attended to calls when similar crimes took place. It should be condemned by all South Africans especially those who witness it in public areas-and should lead to immediate action from the criminal justice system.

Organisations such as Santaco, Numsa and the Human Rights Commission (HRC), condemned the incident. Still, not the police, any government official, or minister was quoted in any of the reports published on the issue condemning the incident. In a report by the Sowetan Live (2008), the Johannesburg Police Metro spokesman Wayne Minnar was quoted saying, “cameras traded in the area were working, but did not understand why the action was not captured and there was a satellite police station near where the incident happened”, yet no arrests were made, or any action taken. Minnar further said, “this could mean Nwabisa Ngcukana may have been let down by the police”.

In 2020, the minister of police revealed that of the 4 058 individuals that were charged for GBV since the start of the lockdown in March 2020, only 130 had been convicted, which translates to a conviction rate of 3% (AllAfrica, 2020), and a conviction rate of 1 in every 10 cases involving minors resulting in conviction (Daily Maverick, 2020). An IOL (2021) report also revealed that of the reported rape cases, only 14% go to trial, and there are convictions in only about 7%. This shows a lack of political will to fight GBV and constitutes complicity by the government and political elites in normalising gender-based violence. Also, the avoidance of addressing this display of excessive male power, combined with apprehensions about race,

ethnicity and identity, has produced socio-political ideologies that avoids tackling the high levels of GBV while creating a climate of justification and normalisation.

In contemporary South Africa, it is no doubt that gender-based violence is being used to maintain gender hierarchies and regulate women (Moffett, 2009; Gqola, 2007). De Nobrega (2009) states that “in a patriarchal and violent society, when women move outside their predefined gender roles, men are then permitted to act outside their stereotypical protective roles to punish these ‘deviant’ women. This does not constitute violence that should be sanctioned, but rather becomes part of the project to ensure social stability”. This sentiment is highlighted by the fewer arrests and convictions for GBV perpetrators in South Africa.

On the other hand, statistics on GBV in South Africa paint a glaring picture of the depth of the scourge and a lack of a proactive approach by political actors to tackle the problem. According to a 2012 research study:

77% of women in Limpopo, 51% of women in Gauteng, 45% of women in Western Cape and 36% of women in KZN, have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime, both within and outside intimate relationships and this is attributed to rigid notions of masculinity that condone violent behaviours towards women, the socio-economic situation of many women that makes them dependent on their male partners, or a patriarchal conservative understanding of gender roles (Saferspaces,2015).

A report titled, “The Restoration of Moral Communities”, produced by the Moral Regeneration Movement (2003), stated that “a democracy such as ours, which has emerged from apartheid ashes, should be founded on sound moral values that will inculcate in each other a sense of pride, oneness and commitment to the common good”. Indeed, GBV can be viewed as a moral issue, but classifying it as such is not good enough. Educating the people is fundamental to ending GBV; outreach programmes are needed, effective policing and crime prevention drives are needed, and the media needs to play its part in raising awareness of GBV.

Community Newspapers And The Reporting Of Gender-Based Violence

Introduction

Community newspapers have a narrower mission than regional or national newspapers. They provide local news and serve the information needs of a specific geographical area. In most geographical areas, no one is challenging these franchises hence competition for the audience attention is low and they command larger audiences. According to the Saving Community Journalism report (2015), community newspapers are a form of communication that strives to cover issues and stories relevant to a specific community or area. Community newspapers throw most of their weight behind providing a specific geographical coverage of events, making national and global news stories relate to them by finding an appealing local angle. This study is looking at three community newspapers namely, *Maritzburg Echo*, *South Coast Sun* and *Zululand Observer*, which are circulated in geographical areas such as Plessislaer, Umlazi, KwaMashu Ntuzuma, Empangeni, and Eshowe. These areas are among the top 30 gender-based violence hotspots in South Africa. Hence it is important to look at the role played by these community newspapers in fighting GBV and the type of messages they carry on GBV.

As long as people continue seeking information, community newspapers serve that purpose (Carpenter-Frank, 2015). Community newspapers embrace their civil duty by promoting their community's general interests and well-being. Community newspapers play a pivotal role in setting the agenda for public debate on social issues such as GBV, encouraging economic growth in their area of circulation, and promulgating geographical identity. Not only do people learn about issues and events from the media, but they also learn how much importance to attach to a topic from the emphasis the media places on it. According to Cushion et al. (2018), far from the power of newspapers being diminished, they continue play an important agenda-setting role in raising debate about the stories they select and editorially frame. Looking at community newspapers' core function and purpose, it is interesting to explore how they set the agenda in the news stories they carry through word choice and framing when reporting on gender-based violence.

Ownership of community newspapers

The ownership of community newspapers is very important because it speaks to the kind of control exercised on the media companies and whether these media companies can properly

and objectively fulfil the critical role they must play in a democracy (Tomaselli, 2017). The three newspapers being looked at in this study, i.e., *Zululand Observer*, *South Coast Sun* and *Maritzburg Echo* are all owned by Caxton & CTP Printers and Publishers, Ltd. Media ownership in South Africa is a highly contested space dominated by a few powerful individuals who own large monopolies (Angelopulo et al., 2016). These owners in most instances ensure that their staff and editors follow their political choices and beliefs. They wield the power to hire and fire staff in key positions if they do not carry out their mandate properly. Caxton & CTP Printers and Publishers, Ltd is dominated and run by whites, with black ownership of only 18.90% (Intellidex, 2016).

Black people feature mostly as non-executive directors of Caxton & CTP Printers and Publishers, Ltd. From this analysis, it is clear that Caxton & CPT Printers and Publishers, Ltd lack black leadership/representation in the day-to-day running of these companies. This lack of diversity in race representations may negatively impact how issues such as gender-based violence are reported in the media as the leadership may have a different ideology and perspective on GBV, especially when it is regarded as a ‘black thing’ in South Africa.

Economic factors and its impact on reporting gender-based violence in community newspapers

Community newspapers mould their content to local community interests. Their content is purely localised, focusing on the immediate community at hand. As most community newspapers are distributed for free to their audiences, their main source of income is through advertising, which to some extent impacts on how they set the public agenda on societal issues such as GBV. It may therefore be a challenge for them to focus on other serious social issues such as GBV because such news may not be an issue of primary concern to their business and may be regarded as non-priority issues. This therefore raises a serious question which requires more thought and an independent research apart from this study: ‘Can community newspapers actually cover GBV in a way that we think they should? Will their business model allow the extensive coverage of GBV?’ Though this study is not directly answering these questions, such questions do impact and complicates the framing and agenda-setting approaches when reporting on GBV in community newspapers, which tend to

vest a lot of power in the hands of editors in a way that does not always acknowledge the current media landscape.

Most of the community newspaper content ratio has an average range of 45% advertisements and 55% news. However, this 55% is largely dominated by social events and sports activities, which leaves little or no space for covering adequately critical social issues such as GBV, crime or political matters. It is therefore most likely that advertisements get first preference regarding space allocation because they are the core business of community newspapers, and other news will be regarded as fillers of the remaining space. With the little space that is left to cover all other news items, it is most likely that if a GBV story makes it to publication, the content will be limited, with a lack of context and in-depth analysis, which may result in a lack of educational value in the story because most of the crucial information may not be accommodated.

It is inherent to explore the connection between community newspapers and the type of social issues they can cover and predilections of its advertisers. The effects of advertising on editorial material especially in community newspapers has not been sufficiently covered by scholars yet. Bagdikian (1983) cited in Lawrence, Soley & Craig (1992), believes advertising inhibits news reporting on controversial issues, and when the media does not self-censor, or cave in to pressure, advertiser respond by withdrawing their advertising from offending media/newspapers. Dunn et al. (1990) believes some reason exists to believe that small financially insecure newspapers are more likely to be influenced by outside pressure on what news they may cover, in exchange of their support. Soley and Craig concluded that, “it is therefore hypothesised that small circulation newspapers will more likely experience advertising pressure than large circulating newspapers and are more likely to acquiesce to such pressure than large newspapers”.

At the same time, by distributing the newspapers for free, they increase their readership, enabling them to charge more for advertising. These community newspapers will therefore prioritize their source of income and readership. They may not like to compromise this relationship with the key stakeholders they serve by reporting ‘too much’ on sensitive matters such as GBV. Reporting on GBV in KZN communities largely dominated by culture,

tradition and patriarchal practices may be viewed as a conflict with the audiences they intend to serve therefore it may be regarded as not good for business.

As pointed out earlier, according to a Statistics South Africa report on the prevalence of GBV in South Africa, the experience of physical violence is greater among the less educated and poor black women, whereas the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse decreases with the wealthy quintile, irrespective of their race, with the prevalence rate as low as 2% among the wealthy quintiles (Stats SA, 2016). However, data on the actual numbers and percentage of GBV according to race is still lacking in South Africa as statistics released by the South African Police Services include all races. This could reflect on the level of understanding and tolerance between the poor and rich regarding critical issues such as GBV and may further highlight and connect the state of being poor and economically disadvantaged, and the perpetration and susceptibility to crimes such as GBV.

Role of community newspapers in fighting gender-based violence

Martin and Copeland (2003) describe community newspapers as a tool for shaping thought, a forum for public discussion and debate, and a way to protect and inform the public about wrongdoing. This is a sentiment this study aims to understand by looking at KZN community newspapers and conversations surrounding GBV. Local factors therefore shape conversations in a community newspaper. People may therefore get an accurate, honest, or curated overview of their neighbours and the issues that matter to them from the local community newspaper, and conversations are framed in the community by them (SLFP, 2021).

Community newspapers can play a pivotal role in increasing awareness and educating their audiences about gender-based violence and related crimes in the geographical areas they circulate. The three significant roles of a community newspaper are: to set the agenda for public debate; encourage economic growth in the area; and foster geographic identity (Saving Community Journalism, 2022). The media is often blamed for being complicit in perpetuating gender-based violence through representations of GBV as trivial, non-priority, and comical and the use of sexist language, which can potentially further normalise this violence and desensitise the public to it (Kohlman et al.,2014). According to Sarup (2005):

the media had still not played an effective role in minimising domestic violence against women. The media can play a lead role in the society's fight against GBV by

increasing awareness. As community newspapers are the eyes, ears, and limbs of the society, they could help a great deal in mitigating violence against women.

At the same time, the media can effectively help activists and government raise awareness and implement programmes to address social issues such as GBV. At the same time, we need to be realistic as to what the media can really achieve because, sadly, awareness and programmes alone do not have much real-world effect as GBV still occurs in countries with high rates of gender literacy.

On the other hand, one of the key and effective strategies to mitigate the risk of GBV that is currently being under-utilised is the media and responsible media reporting especially in developing countries. Ghosh (2020) argues that insensitive and unethical media reporting of GBV may directly impacts how society comprehend the phenomenon. Nevertheless, numerous violations in reporting have been observed. A study by Reporting on Sexual Violence (2013) argues that it is important for community newspapers to add context to individual incidents by referring to the whole spectrum of sexual violence, reporting data on the prevalence of sexual violence and related issues in that particular area/region, counteracting myths and outdated attitudes and also contacting experts to educate the readers.

In addition, community newspapers need to be more forthcoming and explicitly mention to their readers the consequences of GBV on the perpetrator, the community, the family and the country. The media must highlight to its readers the legal and social consequences of the act on the perpetrator and their family members. These include the quantum of punishment mandated by the law for the perpetrators of GBV and the risk of their families being ostracized by the community. Most newspapers tend to use episodic framing when reporting on GBV which tends to frame GBV incidents in individual terms—rather than adopting a thematic frame which tends to locate the incident in some kind of explanatory framework of wider social concerns and responsibilities (Beddoe, 2013).

The role of the media should be to expose and generate awareness of society's problems, not to blame those who have been violated. It is important for community newspaper reporters to be aware of violence against women and avoid using pictures and language insensitively, publishing names and other violations of privacy, as this may result in secondary victimisation (Sarup, 2005).

Principles of community newspapers

According to Milne et al., (2006), the values and principles of community newspapers include: serving a particular geographical area, advancing development that meets the needs of that community, and stimulating dialogue amongst the community members. Community newspapers should therefore aim at inspiring community focussed reporting where the content is centred around the needs of that particular community and give a voice to the community members as opposed to outsiders or those in positions of authority. Community newspapers should be at the forefront in championing equal representation, opposing racism, toxic masculinity, gender inequalities and violence, and advancing media diversity including language and class.

Having highlighted this, however, it is no doubt that community newspapers may encounter obstacles in balancing editorial independence with external control factors especially advertisers. The tension between independence and dependency, between the paper and its clients cannot be ruled out, as sometimes the newspapers may refrain from reporting on issues such as GBV that have the potential to affect the business negatively, the newspaper brand, or the community at large, and /or attracting investors to that particular community. Therefore, community newspapers in traditional communities may be challenged to use GBV stories as breaking news or a point of attraction to their audiences. It is however critical for community newspapers to write stories that speak about the society's challenges and accomplishments, and to educate people about truths and misapprehensions about GBV.

16 Days Of Activism: Government And Civil Society's Response To Gender-Based Violence

Background and origins of the campaign

The celebration of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence was initiated in 1991 by the Women's Global Institute held by the Centre of Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University, New Jersey, in the United States of America. The campaign is commemorated from 25th November to 10th December every year. This 16-day period links with other observances such as the International Day of No Violence Against Women on 25th November, International Women Human Rights Defenders Day on 29th November, World Aids Day on 1st December, International Day of the Disabled on 3rd December and the International Human Rights Day on 10th December every year.

South Africa joined the campaign in 1998 following a watershed conference between a broad section of South Africans, popularly known as the Kopanong Declaration to end gender violence. This was one of the strategic plans and intervention measures to raise awareness of GBV and to push South Africa towards a violence-free society. The Kopanong Declaration envisaged that each year, the 16 Days of Activism would become a platform to heighten awareness and to take stock of gaps and achievements to ensure sustained and measurable efforts to end gender-based violence (DIRCO, 2006).

Focus and impact of the campaign

Since its conception, the 16 Days of Activism campaign has focused on raising awareness of gender-based violence against women and girls. As a socio-political aspect, the campaign sets the tone and agenda for how the country moves forward amid the rising numbers of GBV cases. The aim is to intensify the fight against GBV, speak out against all forms of gender violence perpetrated against women and girls, and influence policy development and formulation to enhance the fight against gender violence. Numerous successes have been recorded against GBV because of the campaign. The campaign has encouraged survivors to speak out and give a voice to women suffering silently to challenge and denounce the hegemonic cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequalities and violence and educate women on their rights and gender equality.

The campaign is also used as an ongoing strategy by individuals and organizations around the world to advocate for the prevention and elimination of GBV, provide a forum in which organizers can develop and share new effective strategies to fight GBV, demonstrate the solidarity of women around the world organizing against GBV, and create tools to pressure governments to implement commitments to eliminate gender-based violence against women (CWGL,1991). The key pillar and vision of the 16 Days of Activism campaign is raising awareness on GBV and advocating for inspired actions by governments and civil rights groups to ensure a world free of any form of gender-based violence.

Criticism of the campaign

One of the major criticisms of the 16 Days of Activism campaign is the continuous exclusion and side-lining of the media as a significant aspect for disseminating information on GBV, to reach as many people as possible, especially in poor, disadvantaged and marginalised

communities. In other words, the campaign lacks an effective and visible media presence. The campaign has become limited to the 16-day period where top government officials, politicians, civil society leaders, and civil organisations are in unison, singing from the same hymn book, criss-crossing the country, speaking out loudly and boldly against the unprecedented high rates of GBV. Unfortunately, this type of activity and proactive approach gradually vanishes after the promulgated 16-day period is over, until the next cycle approaches. The campaign is not a 365-day approach as it should be, considering the everyday occurrence of disturbing GBV incidences in South Africa.

Despite the campaign being observed annually from the 25th of November to the 10th of December, Meintjies (2013) described the campaign as “woefully inadequate and it has become co-opted by the establishment; it has become so routinized that key organisations leave their planning till late; key activists openly question the effectiveness of the campaign and, for many institutions, the ‘16 days’ has become an excuse for a 11 month period of apathy and denial”, having little or no impact on women living below the poverty line. Discrepancies between commitments and promises made by the government and the realities of everyday life being experienced by women and girls daily have been a major talking point affecting the effective fight against GBV (Hadji & Osunkule, 2020).

Non-governmental organisations have deplored the government's apathy and lack of political will to expand the 16-day campaign to a 365-day campaign to increase visibility and awareness (CSV, 2016; Gercheva, 2021). Another criticism of the campaign is that it focuses on GBV in a decontextualized manner, fails to address the root causes of gender-based violence, and being victim-centred, fails to reach out to the perpetrators as being part of the solution to end GBV. The application of language in the campaigns or during the campaign period has been criticised for framing abused women as victims rather than survivors. Being signified as a ‘victim’ is believed to be traumatising, but being signified as a survivor is empowering.

Lastly, the print media in South Africa is often criticised for lacking consistency, overdetermination and exclusion in reporting GBV issues (Maphanga, 2022) as they concentrate their reporting on 16 Days of Activism; when a public figure or celebrity is embroiled in a GBV matter; when there is a massive public discontent, or when the incident is seen as horrific and shocking.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Theories are essential to build a frame through which the study can be better understood. This chapter explores key concepts anchoring the study by consulting and examining past and present literature on news and news values, representation, agenda-setting, framing, 16 Days of Activism campaign, and the role of community newspapers in fighting GBV in South Africa. The blending of conceptual frameworks is utilised in this study to investigate and understand word choice in the reporting of GBV in three KZN community newspapers: *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and the *South Coast Sun*. The selected theories are also used to understand better the relationship between the media and GBV in phenomena South Africa.

News And News Values Theory

Theorization of news

The theorization of news is at the core of news scholarship which considers how media power functions within a larger social context (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). This helps us to look at news within the larger context of how knowledge is produced and distributed (Tomita & Bybee, 1989). According to Zaller (2003) and Gans (2004), the theorization of news is important in assessing the quality of news and deciding what is new, helping in understanding theories of framing and agenda-setting. The theorization of news is at the core of understanding news, news values, news selection and the reasoning behind a story becoming news. This guides this study when exploring how word choice and framing contribute to framing and agenda-setting in reporting GBV in KZN community newspapers.

The theorization of news also includes looking at factors such as impact, timelines, proximity, human interest, conflict, frequency, extraordinariness, relevance and controversy, which are key considerations in selecting news stories. The news carries powerful mythology leading people to regard news as a mirror that is held up to society, a window on the world that tells 'the way it is' (Tuchman, 1978). Like any other form of knowledge, news is also socially constructed. News-making reflects how media power functions within a greater social

context. Tuchman (1978), on the interpretive sociological approach to news, asserts that making news is constructing reality rather than a picture of reality.

Warren and Breed (1955) showed how publishers exercise social control covertly in the newsroom, ultimately leading to self-censorship by journalists. As news companies become part of large global conglomerates, it is often difficult to anticipate the many conflicts of interest that may arise, and journalists find it difficult to avoid reporting that has a relationship to one or more aspects of the interests of the parent company (News Production Theories, 2021).

The theorization of news offers insight into how journalists' societal power, organisational processes and individual characteristics interrelate to shape the news. The news produced or framed as this constructed reality, in turn, frames the ways of thinking about social issues and participation in public life (News Production Theories, 2021). Therefore, a comprehensive theory of news must address two basic questions: what is news; and what makes some pieces of news newsworthy? (Halberstam, 1987).

Understanding news

News is everything new that is happening. News is the end product of a complex process which begins with methodical categorisation and selection of events and issues according to a socially constructed set of categories. Motsaathebe (2020) views news coverage and production as identifying news stories, finding the facts about them, deciding which aspect of the story to publish, and deciding how to structure it, involving an intricate procedure. The influx of news in our lives is uncontrollable and thus hard to observe (Guo, 2012). The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2022) defines news as a report of recent events, previously unknown information, a newsworthy matter, or something with a specified influence or effect.

Zaller (2003) asserts that news should provide citizens with the basic information necessary to form and update opinions on all major issues of the day. It is widely accepted that news substantially impacts people's lives and can set the agenda, focusing people's attention on one or more issues, ignoring others, and influencing personal behaviour (Halberstam, 1987).

Tuchman (1987), therefore, asserts that “making news is the act of constructing reality itself rather than a picture of reality”, a sentiment which makes us view news as a frame.

This study focuses on community newspaper reports on gender-based violence in KZN, from November 2021 to December 2022, with special attention being paid to the 16 Days of Activism campaign period commemorated from the 25th of November to the 10th of December every year. The issue at hand is to understand how language and word choice is applied in the reported GBV related news, considering that new GBV cases are recorded and happen all the time, everywhere, and some never find their way into the news. Despite the advancements in technology and the availability of numerous platforms to access news, newspapers remain an important aspect of everyday life. News is responsible for creating, over time, the ‘consensus’ knowledge by which newsworthiness is recognised by news people and accepted as such by the public (McQuail, 2003). According to Guo (2012), news values give journalists and editors a set of rules by which to work with, plan and execute the content of a publication.

What are news values?

News values can be defined as a “criteria” used by journalistic gatekeepers to identify and select news (Paulussen & Van Aelst, 2021). News in itself plays a fundamental role in shaping public discourse and informing society about important events and issues, but this is not without its own challenges as journalists and editors aim for objective and balanced reporting. Stuart Hall (in Fowler, 1991:12) states that the media do not simply and transparently report events that are naturally newsworthy. Principles of accuracy, fairness and impartiality, are at the heart of journalistic ethics guiding journalists in their quest to uphold truth and transparency (Abbas & Konal, 2023). In addition, news values give journalists and editors a set of rules, which are often intangible, informal, and almost unconscious elements, with which to work, to plan and execute the content of a publication or a broadcast. Despite these set of guidelines/asset of criteria, ethical challenges in journalism have become increasingly complex as the media organisations navigate the demands of objectivity, sensitivity and social impact of news reporting (Abbas & Konal, 2023). In the clearest sense, all that ensues in the world is a new event, and somebody somewhere will be interested in that incident.

The question then is, what takes it from being new to being news? The values applied by different media: local, regional, national and international; print, television, radio, and internet bulletin boards, are as varied as the media (Brighton and Foy, 2007). There are several and various factors, therefore, that are considered to qualify an event to be a news story (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Chinball, 1977; Brighton and Foy, 2007; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001).

Newsworthiness is one of the ideas that spur intense arguments in journalism research because it involves subjective judgements, ethical dilemmas, social responsibility and power relations. Journalists are faced with decisions on what is news and what is not in the selection of stories or events that make it to publication. Because newsworthiness is the idea that some events or topics are more worthy of being reported as news than other, Caple (2018) pointed out that, different media outlets may have different news values and agendas, which can affect how they portray reality and influence public opinion. News values can be seen less as a reflection of what type of information citizens want or need and more as a reflection of organisational, sociological and cultural norms combined with economic factors (Weaver et al., 2007). According to Galtung and Ruge (1965), news values generally refer to those aspects that make a news story worthy or relevant for the audience. Chinball (1977) defines news values as “the criteria of relevance which guide reporter’s choice and construction of newsworthy stories, learnt through informal professional socialisation”.

Brighton and Foy (2007) show that news values tend to be of two kinds: the first examines news stories from the perspective of the working journalist and tries to isolate the features of an event which make it likely to qualify as newsworthy, and the second attempts to take a broader approach incorporating areas such as ideology, cultural conditioning, technological determinism and others. The criteria by which news is arbitrated are: Is it new? Is it unusual? Is it interesting or significant? and Is it about people? (The News Manual, 2020). These elements make up what is classified as ‘news value.’

This study will aim to look at and understand news values at the community level, as what may be considered newsworthy at the community level may differ from what is considered newsworthy at provincial and national level. Because news values are the characteristics that make a story or event more likely to be important or valued by the public, news values of any

kind are therefore contestable because different geographical areas view or assign value to a given scenario differently. This therefore means what we consider as news values are sites of contestation. KZN is viewed as a highly patriarchal society and considered traditional and culturalistic. Hence the framing of gender-based violence may prove to be a challenge to issues of ethical journalism such as accuracy, objectivity, balanced, correct, and educative.

The way reporters in community newspapers apply the criteria of newsworthiness when selecting a story for publishing may differ from the criteria used in provincial and national newspapers. This may be shaped and influenced by the culture and traditions practised in that geographical area they serve and how such a community views issues of GBV, especially when they may consider it as a private family matter that does not concern other community members, therefore, cannot be discussed in public spaces or platforms. Such social conditions may influence the framing of the story, and reporters need to carefully select the words they use in such instances so they cannot 'offend' the audience they serve.

Donsbach (2004) believes news values involve subjective judgements and can never be objective criteria. Hall (1973) suggested that news values are part of an ideologically constructed way of perceiving the world that favours and naturalises the perspectives of powerful elites. Newspaper readers are positioned as to which events are important or more valuable according to the newsworthiness they receive from the media, so the more newsworthy an event is considered to be, the greater the coverage it will receive (Bell, 1991). When describing the value of events, Bell (1991) argues that the best news has just happened. Therefore, time is a basic dimension of news stories. To establish the newsworthiness of the story or event, it is necessary to consider other key factors such as proximity, consonance, novelty and relevance, and prominence.

These key determinants of news value can be challenging. They may not be applicable in community newspapers because of their structural composition, story preferences, the purpose of that community newspaper, leadership, community beliefs, acceptability of such matters in that particular community, and influence of advertisers on editorial decisions. Consonance is important, especially in community newspaper stories, because it is narrowly related to the concept of cultural patterns. The consonance of a story is its compatibility with preconceptions about the social group or nation from which the news event happens, for

example, in this study, community newspapers in KwaZulu-Natal. Because cultural beliefs make a part of who we are, they therefore affect who we are, influence opinions, attitudes, and behaviour towards issues such as GBV in a particular society at a particular time. This means what can be understood as GBV in one cultural setting or race is not considered as such in another culture or race and therefore impacts on news values when considering a story for publication.

Community newspapers and news values

Community newspapers approach news values grounded on the audience-oriented approach. Gans (2004) emphasised what he calls ‘journalistic judgement’ as one factor influencing decisions regarding the newsworthiness of a particular phenomenon or event. It is, therefore, a challenge for journalists in community newspapers to exercise complete detachment and objectivity because of the cultural composition of the societies they operate in.

The principles of journalism, which decree that the media must be responsive to the reality of the society and the needs of the audience they serve, have the responsibility to educate, mobilise and inform the public on sensitive and critical matters such as GBV, can therefore be compromised in community newspapers because of the tradition, culture and geopolitics of the communities they serve. Because patriarchy operates at community, national and international level, it may therefore take long to get certain stories in the public domain e.g., the sexual harassment scandals surrounding Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein. Guiding public opinion to create an active, healthy and inspiring atmosphere is at the core of the press. It is a persistent challenge in community newspapers because of the hegemonic cultural and traditional practices that guide and dominate their societies. Despite the core function of community newspapers being to serve and advance the interests of the communities in which they are geographically located; it is not without its own challenges such as the influence of advertisers on editorial issues as argued earlier in this study. Extraordinariness, relevance, controversy, oddity and human interest are some of the key news values that this study considers when exploring how word choice contributes to framing and agenda-setting in reporting GBV in three KZN community newspapers.

Representation In News Media

Representation theory

The idea of representation falls within the cultural-critical paradigm of media studies. Representation is the product of meaning through language, which is ruled by codes, and always involves the construction of reality. Texts such as newspaper stories communicate their meanings through a process of signification. The media create representations as central signifying practices for producing shared meaning (Hall, 1997). Representations are embedded in every aspect of the saturated media stream and establish norms and common sense about people, groups and institutions in contemporary society (Fursich,2019).

Beyond just mirroring reality, representations in the media, such as in print journalism, create reality and normalise specific worldviews or ideologies. This view understands the concept of ideology as a hegemonic, normalising force in contemporary societies (Eagleton, 1991; Zizek, 1989). This shows that the media play a critical role in defining how audiences understand issues of public concern. Therefore, representations in the media are very important.

According to David Chandler (2006), representations refer to the construction of aspects of reality in any medium, especially mass media, such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities, and other abstract concepts. Another way of looking at representation is through how media such as newspapers, television, film or books portray certain types of people or communication, including women, people of colour, LGBTIQ+ people, people of various religions and traditions, and issues such as GBV.

Representation is inevitably selective, foregrounding some things and backgrounding others, including and excluding information in a story. The way certain groups of people, events, or issues such as GBV are represented in the media can have a huge social impact, raising the question of whether people's attitudes to GBV would change if presented differently.

Representation includes how identities are represented within the text and how they are constructed in the course of production and reception by people whose identities are also

inversely marked with such demographic factors e.g., women and girls in rural communities dominated by patriarchal practices. Identity represents various issues, such as social, political and cultural identities. This cultural identity helps us understand the prevalence of the GBV phenomenon experienced in certain geographical communities because, according to Longchar (2022), “starting at a young age, we embrace traditions and norms of our parents and grandparents and hold on to them as we grow. We continue to practice them as it becomes a source of identity for us”.

Issues of cultural identity represented through text can be identified by looking at word choice, vocabulary and grammar in gender-based violence stories in KZN community newspapers from November 2021 to December 2022. By studying cultural identity, representations can reveal ideology and the hidden aspects of text by looking at linguistic elements through the structure of the language used. This cultural identity can include various aspects such as the community, family, language, class and religion (Holliday, 2010).

The scope of cultural identity includes class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, morality, religion, and political and social positions. This will help understand text's role in identity transformation and how individual identity is formed because of the culture around it. The framing theory further helps to understand how the media play a stronger role in defining how audiences understand an issue of public concern. Agenda-setting theorists established the central role of the media in defining the issues that the public accepts as important. These concepts will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The media's power to steer attention to and from public issues such as GBV often determines which problems society will tackle or ignore. Only those issues that gain publicity have the potential to make people think about social-political ramifications beyond their immediate experience and arouse political interest. However, representations which become familiar through word choice and language on GBV through constant re-use come to feel natural and normal. All these issues play a pivotal role on how reporters and media houses frame GBV by constantly using certain words or narratives that support a particular discourse.

This study will use textual content analysis as the primary method of formal analysis of representation. According to PhD Assistance (2020), textual content analysis “interprets the

meaning behind the words, acts behind communication, and patterns associated with the language". This is useful in determining the presence of certain words, themes or concepts within the stories or text on gender-based violence in KZN community newspapers and in understanding how these word choices contribute to framing and agenda-setting in reporting gender-based violence. Content analysis is useful for understanding language and symbols present in texts to understand how people make sense of and communicate life experiences (Allen, 2017). In most instances, these messages carried in newspaper stories are understood as influenced by the larger social structures.

Representation of gender in the news media

In media, there are ways that each gender is represented based on the stereotypical nature that society has classified men and women. The South African media stereotypes gender in more complex ways, for example, 'glitzy career girls and caring dads'. Generally, in the media, men are typically idealised as strong, tough and powerful both intellectually and physically, as expected by society and on the other hand (Wood, 2007), women are represented as soft, emotional and caring beings whose role is to support those around them and their male counterparts.

Regarding gender, the media plays a huge role in influencing people's perceptions of the differences between men and women and the expectations associated with each gender. In news production, women are less likely to make the news than their male counterparts. A report by the GMMP (2021) revealed that women are believed to make up only 24% of news subjects, and sources reported. A 2019 report by Gender Links further reveals that in the news, the proportion of representation of women in South Africa is as high as 40% during the 16 Days of Activism, dropping to about 33% immediately after the campaign and further wanes as the year progresses (Gender Links, 2019).

To have a better understanding of gender and representation in the media, one needs to understand how masculinity, feminism and gender relations are being constructed in a world that is fast changing. Media representations attempt to project society in its actual form, though sometimes stereotyped and sensationalised, to a greater extent, the media has to conform with society for the audience to identify with them, hence earlier this chapter argued that the application of news values is contestable as it varies from one publication to another

and influenced by the beliefs of the societies in which they operate in. This may not be planned but may be due to the society itself.

According to Llanos & Nina (2011), the media reports on current events provide frameworks for interpretation, mobilise citizens about various issues, and reproduce the dominant culture and society. In news content, women are represented on a few matters, unlike men who dominate business, politics and various other news items, even being experts on commenting on gender-based violence (Gender Links, 2019; Sjoavaag & Pedersen, 2019). This gives the perception that men are the only ones who can make an issue relevant and newsworthy.

Studies have found that although the number of women working in the media has increased globally, the top positions are still male-dominated (White, 2009). This disparity is evident and much worse in Africa as compared with Europe. In Africa, cultural impediments to women fulfilling the role of journalist versus them fulfilling their role in the home remains a huge challenge, i.e., travelling away from home, working at night, and covering issues such as politics, which are considered to fall within the masculine domain remains problematic (Meyers, 2009).

Because of such constraints, female journalists are likelier to be assigned 'soft' news subjects such as family, lifestyle, fashion and arts. In contrast, the 'hard' news, such as politics and the economy, are much less likely to be written or covered by women (GMMP, 2015). In essence, the media often represents women as part of a team in their work, but they often assume a passive rather than active role in critical news issues because this often requires women to move outside the private sphere, which is often met with disapproval by men who still hold on to the belief that women belong to the private sphere of the home (Geertsema-Sligh, 2018). Women, thus, are symbolically excluded from an important cultural symbol of power (Len-Rios et al., 2005).

Status of women in the news media

Women are underrepresented in the news globally, but the situation is slightly different in South Africa where women journalists slightly exceed the number of men in the industry (IWMMF, 2010). Ironically, according to Women in Media cited by Wood (2007), two thirds of journalism graduates are women but they make up less than 2% of those at corporate

management level of newspapers, and only 5% newspaper publishers. This type of underrepresentation at corporate level despite having more women in the media directly affects media programming and roles assigned to women in generating media for consumption by the audiences. Gender stereotypes and underrepresentation of women in the media can contribute to harmful disrespect and violence directed towards women. Research has uncovered stereotyping and underrepresentation of women on various media platforms in South Africa which is in contravention of Section 9(2) of the Constitution which promotes equality in all aspects of life regardless of race, gender or ethnicity (Vu, Lee, Duong & Barnett, 2018). This greatly influences how stories relating to women's issues such as GBV are reported in the media.

A report by Global Citizen (2021) on the representation of women in media highlighted six pressing issues: women only make up around 20% of expert news sources; only 24% of people on newspaper, television and radio news are women; women are the subject of governmental and political coverage only 16% of the time; women reporters are responsible for only 37% of stories in the media; only 6% of news stories highlighted issues of gender equality or inequality; and only 4% of traditional and digital news stories explicitly challenge gender stereotypes. Such media representations normalize the exclusion of women and girls in the critical aspects of news representation.

A GMMP (2015) survey on women's portrayal, participation and representation in the news media covering almost 20 years in 114 countries revealed that less than a quarter of news sources are women. This lack of attention to gender equality issues reflects the minimal exposure women's stories receive in the media. The lack of women's representation in politics is a global phenomenon which is a serious impediment to women's ability to take a firm stand in challenging social ills such as GBV which are only explicitly discussed or made visible in government-led events such as the 16 Days of Activism Campaign (Global Citizen, 2021).

The reason for gender imbalances in the news partly lies with journalism because journalism is primarily drawn to power (Wolfsfeld & Sheaffer, 2006). The fact that the people in power are predominantly male impacts the balance of gender representations in the news (Ross, 2007). Part of the aim of this study is to account for the discursive representation of violence against women and GBV in contemporary South African media, focusing on community

newspapers. The study also aims to bring to light the expectations about gender, sexuality and power implied in public discourses on GBV through language use, given their apparent objectivity. According to Sutherland et al. (2019), there is a growing global interest in the portrayal of violence against women in the news and the impact that reporting may have on the community's understanding, attitudes and behaviours of matters such as gender-based violence.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting is closely linked with gatekeeping, which controls the selection of content to be deliberated on or published in the media. Agenda-setting can be defined as a process that is context-dependent and continually pressed by the search of attracting public attention (Winter, 1981) or diverting public attention. The theory rests on two basic conventions. Firstly, the media sifts and outlines what we see rather than just reflecting stories to the audience (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). For example, seeing a dramatic story at the top of a broadcast or as headline news, as opposed to a story or issue affecting many people, such as gender-based violence. The second assumption is that the more attention the media gives to an issue, the more the public will consider that issue to be important. The agenda-setting process takes place over time (Erbing et al., 1980), and the social realities provide the frameworks for the audience's receptiveness to the information and whether they action it (Winter, 1981).

News reports are presented in a way that when a particular news report is given importance and attention more than other news, the audience will automatically perceive it as the most important news and information given to them. Research has highlighted that the more frequently individuals read print newspapers each week, the greater the number of issues they mention as the order of the day (Schoenbach, De Waal & Lauf, 2005). The increased salience of a topic or issue in the mass media influences the salience of that issue among the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The psychological effect of agenda-setting is that the more a story is publicised in the mass media, the more it becomes prominently stored in individuals' memories. The mass media gives the audience certain stories or issues they should ponder more about, not exactly telling them what to think or how they should feel about the story.

Stories in the media indicate their importance to an audience by their placement, length, amount of coverage, and other treatment (Watt, Mazza, Snyder, 1993). As agenda-setting looks at how the media's coverage determines which issues become the focus of public attention, this study will approach agenda-setting in terms of prominence given to the story, its placement, frequency of the reports, amount of space allocated to the stories on gender-based violence, and choice of words and language used in these stories as a key determinant of the newspaper's agenda-setting. Based on newsworthiness, the media decides 'what' events to broadcast and show through the media's gates. According to Rogers & Dearing (1998), the news media agenda is influenced by factors such as the structure of society, real world indicators, spectacular trigger events, gatekeepers and influential media. This gives credence to Chinball's (1977) earlier statement that views news values as the "criteria of relevance which guide reporters' choice and construction of newsworthy stories, learnt through informal professional socialisation". This, in turn, gives journalists elements to work, plan, and execute the content of a publication or a broadcast.

However, agenda-setting theory is affected by several factors, such as gatekeepers, editors, managers and other external influences, such as the communities the newspapers intend to serve. This is because of their power and influence when publishing sensitive stories such as GBV, which are seen as divisive, contagious, controversial and private matters in their communities. The theory is also criticised for having no effects on people who have already made up their minds on a particular issue, for example, if one views GBV as a private family matter that can be addressed privately, despite compelling evidence that it is a public health issue, it may be extremely difficult or impossible to convince them otherwise.

Framing Theory

The idea of framing is closely linked to agenda-setting theory but expands further by looking at the essence of the issue at hand rather than on a particular topic. The idea is that the media focuses on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. Framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience, the frame influences the choices people make about how to process the information presented to them. Frames are, therefore, abstractions that work to organise or structure message meaning. Frames are thought to influence the perception of news by the audience. In this way, it could be construed as

second-level agenda-setting, telling the audience what to think of and how to think about the issue (Scheufele, 1999).

Definitions

Framing underscores the constructed quality of news and highlights precisely how issues are constructed, how discourse is structured, and how meanings are developed. Gamson & Modigliani (1989) define a frame as a “central organizing idea, for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is the issue signified by the media package of metaphors and other devices.” Gitlin (1980) views frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse. According to what Goffman (1974) labelled as “schemata of interpretation”, framing allows people to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences or events. The focus of news framing is to: establish a cognitive shortcut; oversimplify news; distract the public from important issues; limit the ability of the audience to think outside the box; and activate the magic bullet effect of a cognitively shaped audience (Arowolo, 2017).

Framing provides a means of describing the power of communication to direct individual cognitions towards a prescribed interpretation of a situation or object (Jasperson et al, 1998). It is key to understanding how print and other media present information. That is, to explain how media structure news delivery, promoting certain interpretations of events by selecting certain facts. In essence, frames help journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely package the information for efficient relay to their audiences (Gitlin, 1980). Framing highlights certain parts of an issue allowing the selected elements to become important in influencing an individual’s judgements (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Framing and news

Selection and construction form the foundation of framing (Van Gorp, 2007). To be able to identify framing in the news, Entman (1991) identifies five popular ways for framing news stories: conflict between parties can be prioritised, as opposed to the actual decision made; human interest/personalisation where presenting a story with a human face or personality is promoted over more important aspects; consequence; morality through which the media coverage can often moralise, sometimes due to the indiscretions of political actors, or

alternative policies can be seen as morally questionable; and attributing responsibility, either for a cause or a solution.

Having elaborated on the use and importance of framing in news presentation, this study uses framing as its key theoretical frame in exploring how word choice contributes to framing and agenda-setting in the reporting of gender-based violence in KwaZulu-Natal community newspapers from November 2021 to December 2022. The unit of analysis will be based on individual news articles which appeared in the three selected community newspapers, the *South Coast Sun*, *Zululand Observer* and the *Maritzburg Echo*, during the above-mentioned period. In identifying these news frames, this study will use a model by Gamson and Modigliani (1989), focussing on rhetorical devices, which include word choice, metaphors, similes, familiar exemplars and illustrations, provocative language and descriptors, catchphrases and visual imagery, that may be directed towards the reporting of gender-based violence in the KZN community newspapers.

These rhetorical structures describe journalists' stylistic choices concerning their intended effects on the audience. News sources are another important frame that will be considered in this study, for example using expert sources, official sources, eyewitness reports, or victims' voices to claim empirical validity or facticity and to link certain point-of-view to authority. Also, news reporting issues, including the frequency of coverage, labelling, information included and omitted, and episodic or thematic focus, will be considered part of the frames explored in this study. In essence, the efficacy of frames is found in their ability to make certain elements and perspectives more salient, thereby increasing the chances that certain schemas of interpretation will be evoked (Carlyle et al., 2008).

Sutherland et al. (2015) argue that most of the research in the public domain has focused its attention on how media messages about violence against women are framed in the news. Most of these studies have concluded that the media, including the press, broadcast and online news, misrepresents the realities of women's experience of violence against them (Sutherland et al., 2015). Some common ways this occurs is by following popular themes such as misrepresentation, sensationalism, social context, rape myths, blame and responsibility, and voices of authority and opinion. These news reports tend to focus

primarily on separate incidents or events at specific places and times, while ignoring the overarching social context in which the violence occurs.

The social context of media reports on violence against women is highly skewed towards event-based reporting or episodic framing (Bou-Franch, 2013; Halim & Meyers, 2010). How these stories are framed can impact how audiences assign responsibility to the given situation. Episodic framing, in this sense, tends to provoke individualistic rather than societal attributions of responsibility. In contrast, thematic framing, which includes elements of the social context of the crimes, tends to have the opposite effect (Scheufele, 1999). For example, failure to present murder-femicide within the context of intimate partner violence was noted among studies investigating media depictions of intimate partner homicide (Morgan & Politoff, 2012).

One of the media's roles is to objectively inform citizens about what is happening in their environment, equally representing and giving a voice to all actors involved in a given story (Ronning et al, 2002). While journalism is built around a public expectation and institutional promise of balanced, unbiased reporting focused on facts, and patriarchal norms, have helped define key journalistic precepts such as newsworthiness, accuracy and credibility, as well as allocation of status to 'hard' news at the expense of more female-oriented 'soft' news (Alat, 2006; Steiner, 2014).

Media reports use familiar, culturally resonating themes to relay information about events (Gamson, 1984). Journalists use these frames to construct social reality for audiences and thus give meaning to words and images (Tuchman, 1978). It is important to note that framing may not necessarily be a deliberate choice by journalists themselves but a look at the world through frames such as their education, upbringing, gender, ethnic background, knowledge of the issue and institutional policies. All these factors and choices made in the newsroom collectively form the frame through which the media decides to show the world to the audience. Creating frames for stories is commonly a mindful choice of sources, reporters, journalists and editors.

In essence, frames justify the media as gatekeepers who mindfully collect, select, organise and present the ideas, events and topics they cover (Mass Communication Theory, 2017).

Covering one event, ignoring another, covering one more than the other, and deciding which words to use to cover an event or whom to give a voice are all key to framing. As frames examine the selection and salience of certain aspects of an issue by exploring images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors and messages, this will be achieved in this study by looking for keywords relating to GBV, key phrases that reinforce a particular representation of reality, for example, victim blaming, and a specific emotion toward it, and the omission of other elements that could suggest a different perspective or trigger a different sentiment.

Framing assumes that how an issue is characterised in news reports can influence how it is understood by audiences (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In other words, by making an issue more salient in people's minds, through agenda-setting, the mass media can also shape people's thoughts when making sense of social issues such as GBV. While agenda-setting focuses on efforts by the media to determine issues to be discussed in the public sphere, framing goes a step further by determining what the audience should think about such issues and how to think about such issues. According to Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007), the relationship between agenda-setting and framing needs to bridge the level of analysis and answer the questions of how messages are created, how they are processed, and how the effects are produced.

Framing effects and equivalency framing

Since frames are thought to influence the audience's perception of news and provide a means of describing the power of communication to direct individual cognitions towards a prescribed interpretation of a situation, it is, therefore, important to look at framing effects in terms of equivalency framing. Framing effects in the context of this study looks at when the same problem is presented using different representations (equivalency framing) of information, which can influence the readers to make significant changes to their decisions or even reverse them (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Framing effects are evident when people respond differently to something depending on whether it is positive or negative. This is usually induced by how the information is presented rather than what is being said.

According to Druckman (2001c), equivalent frames refer to statements which are logically equivalent but phrased differently, thus phrasing that makes people make different judgements depending on which aspect of a statement was intentionally emphasised by the

writer. This is precisely what this study looks at when exploring how word choice and framing contribute to agenda-setting in reporting GBV in three KwaZulu-Natal community newspapers. Sometimes political and social processes such as patriarchy, culture and tradition have the potential to reduce framing effects, and with KZN being a highly patriarchal and traditional community (Isike & Uzodike, 2011), studying frames such as word choice, story frequency, story priority, image use, and sources used is important in understanding how framing effects are applied and work in the stories being looked at.

According to Flanagin & Metzger (2000), news reports provide information that we tend to trust, and news is rated as more credible than any other media content. As stated earlier in this discussion, the negative or positive presentation of information is key because it affects the people's interpretation of the issue being discussed. Negative frames are usually used when the media wants people to stop doing something perceived to be wrong. In his study, Hilbig (2012a) demonstrated how people process negatively framed statements more fluently and effectively. Therefore, this study's idea of equivalent framing looks at different modes of presenting equivalent information on the same dimension (Chong & Druckman, 2007) in a different (negative) manner. According to Baumeister et al., (2001), negative information tends to have a stronger influence on judgements and evaluations than positive information because negative information tends to be associated with possible dangers. Chong & Druckman (2007) further emphasised that negatively framed statements receive a higher truth rating than positively framed statements.

Etic/emic approach

The etic/emic approach is relevant to studying social life, culture and society. According to Pike (1954: 8), emic/etic approaches are two basic standpoints from which a human observer can describe human behaviour, each of them valuable for certain purposes. The etic approach would rely on a generalised classification system devised by the researcher in advance for the study of any particular culture in order to classify behavioural data from across the world, for instance, a researcher might outline a series of formal criteria to distinguish among different speech acts, such as statements, orders and promises (Mostowlansky & Rota, 2020) ; an approach used by this study in deciding to look at specific descriptive and emotive words used in the reporting of GBV in three KZN community newspapers. Such an etic taxonomy, according to Reiss (1985), could then be employed to compare the use of distinct function of language in different settings or text. Emic approach in this study would dispense with a *priori* means of classification focussing

on one culture at a time such as, the five themes of *crime and justice, fear, suffering, gruesomeness, and violence* that emerged from the data, and its goal was to discover and describe a structural pattern of mental and bodily activities that the members of that culture, consciously or unconsciously, regard as distinct or significant for their system of behaviour. A clear understanding of the GBV phenomenon in community newspapers is therefore dependent on the intentions of the journalists and editors through the selection and use of certain word choices which could serve to highlight the issue of GBV reporting under consideration or to debunk the myths surrounding it.

For Pike (1954), the emic standpoint as applied for this study, provided deeper insights into the culture of reporting GBV in community newspapers through descriptive and emotive words, which in the future would help scholars understand the attitude, motives, and interests of social actors within the context of their cultural wholes. Thus, according to Sutcliffe (2019: 30), emic/etic approach address the question of *how* rather than *by whom* the object of knowledge is constructed, as displayed by the research sub-questions for this study. The emic/etic standpoints therefore combine two points of view on the same data to represent its object (Kassam & Bashuna, 2004:209-12). Mostowlansky & Rota (2020) conclude, an emic approach would call attention to the fact that two etically identical behaviours can in fact differ profoundly, depending on the meaning of the actors, hence this study recommended equivalency framing in the reporting of GBV instead of more commonly used word choice as a way of generating curiosity and broadening the readers imagination of the meaning of such ‘new’ words that may be used in the GBV reports.

How gender-based violence is framed in South African media

Gender-based violence in South Africa can be placed within the structural intersectionality where individuals are situated within the overlapping structures of subordination so that the reality of multiple hierarchies results in complex and compounded effects as these multiple systems of oppression interact with one another (Crenshaw, 1993). For example, women’s understanding and experience of gender-based violence is shaped and influenced by race, ethnicity and sexuality, which compound and change how GBV impacts them.

Gender-based violence has been one of the primary areas of advocacy for women in South

Africa since the advent of democracy in 1994. Regarding the magnitude of the problem, the South African Police Services (SAPS) releases figures annually for different categories of violence. However, there is a consensus among the people that gender-based violence is common and widespread in South Africa, deeply engrained in homes, workplaces, cultures and tradition (Govender, 2023), and most cases go unreported. In post-apartheid South Africa, race and racism have become reference points for framing GBV (Britton, 2006; Burris 2022). Framing is a concept used extensively in discourse analysis. This section of the study will be used as a broader analytical tool to understand the main discourses of violence and gender-based violence and how it is understood and viewed by society.

Moffett (2009) argues that narratives about gender-based violence tended to be 'rewritten' as stories about race rather than gender. As a result, human rights and gender equality have become the primary way in which advocacy aimed at the protection and emancipation of women has been framed. Some have framed GBV as rooted in socio-cultural and historical practices and beliefs (Perrin et al. (2019). Also, the increasing attention on violence against women at an international level now permeates the democratisation process and how counter-discourses on race and nationalism seek to limit the boundaries on how gender-based violence is framed in South Africa.

Acknowledging GBV and talking about it without proper action to stop it is not enough. The implication of putting much emphasis and basing on moral renewal has again resulted in the government framing GBV as a moral issue that can be handled at the family level rather than a gender issue that needs consensus by all sectors, hence the failure of policing and to act on the Noord Street taxi rank attack in 2008. This also implies that perpetrators of gender-based violence are viewed as immoral deviants, not a display of violent masculinities, and gender-based violence has little or nothing to do with power and identity.

The frames and discourses highlighted here are inclined towards camouflaging the complexity and depth of gender-based violence in favour of simpler narratives. The stance usually taken by some governments has hindered and limited the alternative understanding of gender-based violence (Klugman, 2017). These political and social practices directly and discursively create and recreate frameworks in which we understand identity, oppression, violence, victimhood and abuse, and this often erases marginal voices (Hoppstadius, 2020).

Language as A Frame for Gender-Based Violence in The Media

Language, gender and reality

This section examines the relationship between gender, language, cognition and perception in the context of gender-based violence. This, in particular, considers the language of gender violence, sexual assault and related issues and how words and communication styles can affect and are affected by what we believe to be ‘reality’. The concept also highlights how the language used to describe violence against women may operate to minimise these acts (Easteal et al., 2012). Therefore, the choice and use of particular words may contribute to a misunderstanding and understating the committed offence, its gravity and proper categorisation.

According to a Global Citizen (2020) report, the media need to report on GBV in a way that is accurate and sensitive to educate the public better and help bring awareness to the issue. United Nations Technical Advisor Luxolo Matomela said, “the media should try to avoid sensationalising or skirting around the word rape, and words like ‘forced sex’ or ‘nonconsensual sex’ should be avoided and accurately phrased as rape and using the phrase ‘sex scandal’ makes it seem as if the survivor had a choice in the matter, and should be avoided” (Global Citizen, 2020).

It is apparent that in most instances, communication may strongly reflect masculine language styles, morals and values because the political and social system has been or is still being run largely by males though women are increasingly getting recognition in political structures. However, it is slowly showing some signs of evolving. De Beaviour, cited in Davies (1994: 168), summed this up by saying, “men have created the legal world in their own image, confusing it with the absolute truth”. It is on this premise that our communication systems are based on male values, which are constantly reinforced by the gendered language system used within our media system.

The construction of our society, culture and identity has been established through a continuous process of performance and socialisation. This means that gender-based violence by men can be a behaviour learned from hearing what other men say, seeing what other men do to women, our social orientation on how to treat women, or what we read about violence

against women in the newspapers. These observations teach us what we believe as acceptable behaviour (Easteal, 2001). This study argues that there are other factors, such as word choice, that journalists habitually introduce to the stories through labels of controversies. This will be analysed and viewed under the umbrella term of language as a frame and its influence on agenda-setting news stories on GBV. These labels are associated with newsworthiness after being used repetitively over a sustained period (Motsaathebe, 2020).

The role of language

Language plays an important role in the socialisation process. Ore (2003) describes socialisation as a process by which individuals learn the roles, rules and expectations that society attaches to particular social positions. Language is the medium of interaction; as such, it is the means through which social norms are transmitted. Through language, individuals, such as reporters, can describe their perceptions of reality, shaping how others should perceive and respond to them.

Although language is not the only social factor shaping reality: society's social institutions such as the family, education, economy, and media play their part, language plays an extremely important one (Ore, 2003). It is interesting to note that language alone does not create reality, but language and language use are widely perceived to reinforce individual perceptions of reality. Language, therefore, can be a key contributor to maintaining male dominated power structures. Language allows us to name and categorise things, and once something is named, for example, murder, rape, assault, or abuse, it can be investigated, and facts and status can be attached to it.

Using words or phrases interchangeably can influence how gender-based violence is framed. For example, using the word 'kill' instead of 'murder' to describe the death of a woman at the hands of her husband, and 'sexually assaulted' or 'non-consensual sex' instead of rape, lessens the gravity of the crime committed to a being culpable homicide offence or challenges that intimate partners face, or intimate moments that went wrong, therefore influencing how the readers may interpret and understand GBV.

The language that feels appropriate in certain circumstances subsequently filters what we want or choose to see, and the sequence continues. As a result, these dominant beliefs contribute significantly to the words we use in conversational styles. An example of how

language and framing can influence our perceptions is demonstrated in a study by Loftus & Palmer (1974), which showed how eyewitness testimony could be influenced by the words used by the journalists in questioning the witness, e.g., the word 'killed' works as a lens which alters intentionality, abuse and pre-meditation.

In the instance of femicide, the word 'killed' will be more inclined towards suggesting that the fatality was not intentional, i.e., it points towards being a homicide case, which therefore downplays the issue of gender-based violence and may refer to a non-criminal act. By explicitly classifying the femicide case as 'murder', it is a homicide committed intentionally. Brearley (1932) defines homicide as violent death which is neither a suicide nor an accident, e.g., femicide. Homicide looks at patterns of who kills whom and the reasons why it happened, i.e., was it premeditated? In essence, homicide can be viewed as manslaughter, malice or murder, e.g., spousal killings, marital murders or domestic homicide, resulting from home conflict between intimate partners.

Just as language helps reporters to frame GBV in a certain way, it also limits the other possible ways it can be viewed. Berger & Luckman (1969); Kramsch (1998) echoed that not only does language force us to think within the confines of the syntax, but we can only think and communicate about concepts if our language provides us with words to do so within the confines. Language influences how we view the world around us, understand issues such as gender-based violence, and act in those situations. If used mindfully and purposefully, language could be a crucial tool in curbing GBV as it can be used to raise awareness, combat and expose the issue of GBV that is so prevalent in South Africa.

The media can play a part in determining how the readers understand sexualised violence. Benedict (1992) argues that the press has continued to frame stories about violence against women in terms that discredit the victims. The naming analysis is critical to word choice and framing, which involves how characters are named in stories of gender-based violence, as it has great consequences for how they are anticipated. For example, suppose the perpetrator of a GBV crime is named as something callous such as beast, ogre or fanatic. In that case, it is an expression of trying to highlight how extreme, aggressive or the amount of force used in committing the act. On the other hand, if the perpetrator is simply referred to as just simply human, it erases or undermines the actions of the perpetrator. The conscious use of language

in a counter-discursive manner is key to raising awareness about gender-based violence (Oparinde & Matsha, 2021).

Using words such as ‘killed’ instead of ‘murdered’, ‘forced penetration’ or ‘non-consensual sex’ instead of raped, or ‘slapped’ when being disciplined instead of abused impacts how the reader interprets GBV. This use of words influences how the audience understands the issue. In essence, the context in which language is used, the socially, culturally or written text includes indexicality, i.e., pointing to some object or direction in the context in which it appears, and the contribution to the meaning of the subject or issue being referred to or discussed. Word choices pointing towards GBV, violence or abuse index the content of an expression with the place of the speaker.

Authors such as Foucault (1970), Fairclough (1989) and Van Dijk (2006), have stressed the power of language and discourse. Fairclough (1989) argues that the use of language in everyday context has the power to construct reality and influence our world view, that is, language is power and has the potential to maintain or challenge power relations in society.

Fairclough (1989) reaffirms the connection between language, power and ideology, in which Oparinde and Matsha (2021) comment, “it is to a greater extent, befitting to envisage how the power of language can be harnessed to combat GBV and counter the discourse and social structure that normalises or naturalises it”. These counter-discourses oppose and shift focus away from a dominant discourse and seek to present alternative understandings of a given issue. Burney (2012) argues that a counter-discourse is a form of deep resistance that speaks through creativity, words or actions, deliberately negating the dominant discourse.

This is the position that community newspapers need to take in the fight against gender-based violence. The dominant discourse on gender-based violence in most instances is whereby violence against women is normalised through the ways in which the message is framed, and how language is used. Reframing how we speak, for example in news stories, and who speaks about a social issue, serves to challenge, negate, or reaffirm the status quo (Oparinde and Matsha, 2021).

Language of blame and violence

The choice of using words either “victim” or “survivor”, “killed” or “murdered”, “beaten” or “assaulted”, “rape” or “non-consensual sex”, impacts on the judgement of blame. The choice of words or terminology is very important when discussing or writing on gender-based violence. Eaton (2019) demonstrated how language constructs, empowers, disempowers, and positions the issue of blame in sexual violence through how it describes and constructs GBV.

In society, men commit acts of violence against women every day. Women’s lives are adversely affected by this, i.e., the actual violence or the fear of it. For this reason, the messages that the media engenders in reporting such crimes are critical. Reporters and news editors manipulate language resources to communicate specific ideological perspectives and viewpoints in reporting events. In newspapers, the relationship between language and ideology is crucial to the readers' interpretation of meaning.

Journalists use various techniques to frame a story, and their choice of words, images, metaphors, and catchphrases are not trivial matters (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Feminist academics have noted the importance of framing and language in shaping portrayals of women in general and particularly with regard to issues such as violence against women. Investigating word choice and framing in newspaper articles, therefore, helps us to see the value and significance of words against other things because language disparities can influence social inequalities.

The choice of words or language use has a great impact on how the perpetrator, victim or survivor is viewed or blamed in the crime. It is, therefore, important to identify the variations in the degree of bias or neutrality which are inscribed in the word choices which reporters make. In trying to understand language, a text is seen as a product of a particular ideological persuasion that determines the *why and how* of saying the text, e.g., using the words ‘killed’ or ‘murdered’ interchangeably may reflect the opposite ideological angles of reporting. Also, using phrases such as ‘she was drunk, or drinking with the perpetrator, or she was flirting, or wearing too revealing clothes’ can be suggestive that the victim ‘invited’ sexual abuse upon herself, or she agreed with the perpetrator to some extent.

Violence against women is an issue that emerges on the news media and public agenda sporadically, typically driven by specific events such as a man ‘killing’ his estranged partner, wife or his children or a high-profile sexual assault involving public figures or celebrities. The transformation of societal attitudes about sexual assault, sexual harassment and family violence is essential as conservative messages which reinforce patriarchal gender norms may contribute to the limitations and efficacy of the legislative reform. The power that the media possesses through language and word choice can reinforce or transform public opinion about gender-based violence. We must be conscious that the media messages are not simply a ‘one-way’ dialogue as diverse audiences will likely filter, interpret and appropriate them differently based on their experience.

Language of violence against women

The term ‘domestic violence’ understates the seriousness and criminality of such violence within the home. ‘Domestic’ in this instance means private and is often perceived as a relatively insignificant place. This further proves my argument earlier that, according to cultural norms and values, gender-based violence, especially amongst married couples or live-in partners in most communities, is viewed as a private family matter that cannot be discussed with outsiders or ventilated in public spaces or platforms, as it is supposed to be handled and resolved privately within the family structure itself. By prefixing violence with the word ‘domestic’ as a general category of offence, it becomes less criminal and counterbalances the role of the culprit.

According to Easteal (2003), it is problematic when newspaper reports use language, word choices, or frames that minimise histories of brutal assaults of women, referring to them in some instances as stormy relationships, matrimonial discord, intimate partner problems, difficulties or spats. For example, taking a human life within the context of domestic violence should not be reviewed or reported in newspapers with leniency. As mentioned earlier in this study, a gender-based crime must be named as it is, not otherwise. Not even an extreme domestic discord can ever be an excuse for the perpetrator to take the law into their own hands and end the life of a female victim.

In issues relating to rape, the language used in newspaper reports may fail to describe the sexual assault appropriately. For example, ‘unwillingly engage in sexual intercourse’ may

describe forced vaginal penetration or a non-consensual sexual act, which should be explicitly referred to as rape. While improperly touching a woman's privates without her consent may be reported as fondling, groping, brief touching or being taken advantage of, which should also be explicitly referred to as sexual assault or abuse.

This whole notion brings to the fore the idea that there are still many people-out there who believe that abused women put themselves in questionable situations where the male should not be held entirely responsible for the assault (McMahon, 2010) e.g., the Noord Street Taxi Rank incident in 2008. Campbell et al., (2004) reiterate that women are viewed as more to blame if they are seen to be dressed improperly or in sexually revealing clothing or as intoxicated before the assault.

This narrative may also reveal how the framing of such matters in newspaper reports is publicised. Word choice, language and framing may indeed reflect on the construction of how the readers interpret gender-based violence. Generally speaking, the male-oriented language systems, values, and ways of knowing to create a communication system that is incapable of understanding the history of women's lives and relationships (Lindqvist et al., 2019). As a result, women are further subordinated to violence through the language of blame, the language of violence and word choices used in the media when framing GBV (Easteal et al., 2012).

Chapter Four: Research Design And Methodology

Introduction

With the extremely high levels of GBV being experienced in South Africa, a number of possible explanations and reasons for this were highlighted in the previous chapters. To further understand the GBV phenomenon, taking a closer look at how framing and word choice was used in the reporting of GBV in three KZN community newspapers, namely, *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and the *South Coast Sun*, from November 2021 to December 2022 helped in expanding the understanding of how agenda-setting was applied in the newspaper stories. This also enhanced knowledge and contributed to an increased understanding of how GBV is framed in community newspapers through exploring how word choice was applied in functional texts by the three publications. Functional texts in this instance were the GBV related stories explored by this study, that were meant to provide critical information to helping the reader understand the entire story comprehensively. Also, taking a closer look at word choice and language helped in determining the types of descriptive and emotive words used in the reporting of GBV in these three KZN community newspapers. Lastly, paying attention to framing and word choice helped in determining the changes that occurred between the 16 Days of Activism period of November to December 2021 and November to December 2022.

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology used in this study. Firstly, constructivism was looked at as the research paradigm guiding the study. This was followed by a discussion of the mixed methods research methodology of content and thematic analysis adopted by the study to gain an in-depth understanding of the GBV phenomenon discussed. The chapter elucidated the sampling plan, data generation and analysis methods used to generate data for this study. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the sample size, which comprised three community newspapers, namely *Maritzburg Echo*, *Zululand Observer*, and the *South Coast Sun*. The selection or preference of these three community newspapers was intentional based on the premise of their geographical location, language of print, and areas of distribution that experienced worsening GBV statistics from 2021 to 2022.

Rationale Of Study

The rationale for choosing KZN as a province of study and its community newspapers was necessitated by and based on the following assumptions. Firstly, of the 30 GBV hotspots identified by the South African Police Services in 2020, nine of these areas were located within the province of KwaZulu-Natal (TimesLive, 2020). In terms of the number of GBV crimes reported, the areas were ranked as follows in 2020: Umlazi 7th, Empangeni 9th, Osizweni 12th, Inanda 13th, KwaMashu 14th, Ntuzuma 16th, and Plessislaer 29th. In 2022, out of the 30 GBV hotspots identified in South Africa, Inanda was ranked 1st, Empangeni 4th, Plessislaer 6th, Eshowe 10th, Umlazi 11th, KwaDukuza 13th, and KwaMashu 29th (The Citizen, 2022). This evidence from 2020 to 2022 showed that the rate of GBV cases in KZN worsened, and it is therefore of interest to understand how community newspapers in and around these identified hotspots reported on GBV and the kind of GBV messages they relayed to their audiences with a focus on word choice and language.

These areas also recorded the highest overall total of gender-related crimes and other crimes in the country. Secondly, the need to understand how the three community newspapers, the *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun*, which are circulated in and around these GBV hotspots, prioritised the reporting of GBV by looking at how frequently they posted an article that is GBV related, Thirdly, the overall high rates of GBV in the country and pre-existing gender inequalities; and finally no previous research specifically focussing on word choice and the application of language in the reporting of GBV in KZN or South African community newspapers has been carried out before the conception of study.

Having said this, these three selected newspapers stood in as a representative sample covering the other identified GBV hotspots in KZN where the author was unable to access the preferred English community newspapers distributed in these areas due to their unavailability both online and hard copies. For data collection and analysis, the preferred method for this study were the mixed-methods sequential explanatory design which consisted of two distinct phases: quantitative followed by qualitative (Creswell et al., 2003). In this design, the researcher first collected and analysed the quantitative data. Secondly, the qualitative data was collected and analysed to help look at the word choice and formulated themes based on the quantitative results obtained in the first phase. Furthermore, the research's ethical considerations, rigour and trustworthiness were examined. This chapter concluded by

providing a reflexive statement and looking at the limitations and challenges encountered during this study.

Research Paradigm

Babie (2011) defines a paradigm as one of the structural models or frames of reference we use to organise our observations and reasoning. Kuhn (1977) refers to a paradigm as a research culture with a set of beliefs, values and assumptions that a community of researchers has in common regarding the nature and conduct of research. According to Latler (1986a), research paradigms inherently reflect our beliefs about the world we live in and want to live in. A paradigm implies a pattern, structure and framework, or system of scientific and academic ideas, values and assumptions (Olsen, Lodwick & Dunlop, 1962). This study is contained within the constructivist paradigm, specifically social constructivism.

The reason for using constructivism as a paradigm for this study is because it helped the researcher in gaining a better understand of specific situations or phenomenon such as GBV. According to Honebein (1996), a constructivist paradigm is an approach that asserts that people construct their understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences, as argued in chapter three. Vygotsky (1978) views constructivism as a theory of learning that centres on the individual's construction of meaning and understanding of the world through a social process. The constructivist paradigm focuses on understanding the social world through subjective experience. Exploring how word choice, language, framing and agenda-setting was applied in the construction of news in KZN community newspapers helped in understanding how journalists and media houses approaches the issue of GBV in news construction.

Thompson (2019) stressed that constructivism explores the construction of reality through language, communication, media, culture and society; an approach that this study undertook. Constructivism, as a theoretical framework to describe social behaviours and media in an intersubjective sphere, should be able to affect and shape individuals or communities' social identity and social norms rather than directly influencing their behaviour (Perdana, 2017). As discussed in chapter three, this therefore means framing, agenda-setting, word choice, and language use in news presentation are all tenets of constructivism. As a result, the interaction of people and newspaper text helps in defining situations such as GBV and constitute their

interests in such cases. This means the messages carried, in or language used, in newspaper texts on GBV through the selection and use of particular words, phrases or expressions form a subject of discussion among community members and may reinforce certain perceptions or dissenting ideas on GBV.

Community newspapers or any other form of media plays a pivotal role in influencing social behaviour, particularly collective behaviours and remodelling of these collective behaviours (Perdana, 2017). Constructivism is very useful to this study because it teaches us that all knowledge develops as a result of social interaction and language use, and is, therefore a shared rather than an individual experience. It is therefore very critical to examine closely the language and word choice for framing and agenda-setting as used in newspaper articles on GBV being discussed.

Research Design

The design for this study employed the mixed methods approach, i.e., a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The primary method of analysis was quantitative content analysis, and the secondary was qualitative thematic analysis. According to Gratton & Jones (2010), primary research refers to the collection of original data, specific to a particular research project. Thematic analysis was preferred as a qualitative method for analysing the quantitative data and this entailed searching across the primary data to identify, analyse, and report repeated patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using thematic analysis, this study was able to look at word choices and prevalent themes in all the articles on GBV across the three newspapers being discussed.

The primary data, i.e., the quantitative data gathered through content analysis, involved looking at all the GBV-related stories published in the three community newspapers for the period of study November 2021 to December 2022. Content analysis as a quantitative method was used to numerically verify the total number of GBV related stories published. This helped in identifying the types of words used in the newspaper stories discussed, thus helping to establish themes. The quantitative process helped by considering the differences and similarities of word choices used by the selected community newspapers circulated in these GBV hotspots in KZN. The mixed method approach was preferred for this study because of the need for a comprehensive

understanding of the subject of study. Overall, thematic analysis as a qualitative method was used to analyse the quantitative data to establish, identify themes, and report repeated patterns.

Mixed Methods Approach

Mixed methods combine qualitative and quantitative approaches in the methodology of a study. According to Brannen (2005), the mixed method approach promotes a greater understanding of findings; that is, the quantitative data can demonstrate that change or frequency that occurred and by how much; qualitative data then helps the researcher to understand why these changes occurred. The data generated through the quantitative method helped identifying if any changes occurred in terms of the number of GBV-related articles posted by the three publications discussed during the 16 Days of Activism Campaign of November to December 2021 and November to December 2022. According to Annasingh & Howell (2016), the mixed methods approach helped in adding breadth and scope to the project.

By using both the quantitative and qualitative methods, the results from the quantified data generated through content analysis informed the use of the second method, thematic analysis, by helping in identifying and formulating the significant themes that persisted through words used repeatedly. In this study, the quantitative approach collected numerical data used for framing and word choice in reports on GBV, while the qualitative approach uncovered the predominant themes; hence it was essential to use both data types. In essence, the mixed methods approach gave the researcher a better understanding of the research problem (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009; Creswell, 2009).

The mixed method approach was adopted to enhance the completeness and accuracy of the interpretation of the study. To minimise the weakness inherent in a single approach, convergence of the results was sought by using the mixed methods approach (Brannen, 2005). According to Reichardt & Rallio (1994), mixed methods are complementary because there are enough similarities in fundamental values to form an enduring partnership. This is so because many theories can explain any set of data. Both the qualitative and quantitative data have strengths and weaknesses, and a combination of both approaches in this study through triangulation focused on the strengths of each approach. Using mixed methods helped in minimising or limiting the disadvantages of each approach. One of the key

weaknesses that was dealt with by using mixed methods was that, the quantitative approach only took a snapshot of the phenomenon by quantifying words on GBV. Using qualitative analysis therefore helped in contextualising and giving meaning to these words by analysing how descriptive or emotive these words were, consequently gaining a deeper understanding of the GBV phenomenon. Also, the qualitative method helped to holistically understand the human experience of GBV through word choice and to figure out how meanings were shaped through and in culture (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), which quantitative data alone cannot achieve.

The mixed method approach has several distinct advantages, such as methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation involves the combination and use of both qualitative and quantitative methods and data sources to study the same phenomenon (Denzin, 1978); that is, the researcher pursued convergence of results, thus increasing the validity of the findings. Patton (1990) is of the view that triangulation assists the researcher in avoiding allegations of bias by using one method and one source for the study. Patton further emphasises that “triangulation helps the researcher guard against the accusation that a study’s findings are simply an artefact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator bias”.

Using content analysis to identify the descriptive and emotive words used in the reporting of GBV helped the researcher to stay within the scope of the research and not allow personal experiences to influence the research direction and outcomes. Because of the subjective nature of qualitative research, it was difficult for the researcher to be detached completely from the data because of his own prejudices, orientation and upbringing in a patriarchal and traditional society. Hence using one method may have resulted in creating subjective data as a result of the researcher’s own personal experiences of GBV. To mitigate this issue, the study adopted the use of triangulation. Also, the study used a broader sample size which included three community newspapers such as *Maritzburg Echo*, *Zululand Observer*, and the *South Coast Sun*, and an extended time period from November 2021 to December 2022.

Sampling

Introduction

Understanding gender-based violence is strongly associated with our constructions of gender, gender identities, and knowledge of gender parity based on language application and in terms of race and socio-economic conditions prevailing in the region or place of study. For this reason, these categories cannot be ignored entirely, as they seem important in understanding the prevalence of GBV in the nine identified GBV hotspots in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. This also helped in understanding the framing of messages on GBV conveyed by community newspapers circulating in the province. As indicated in the previous chapters, GBV in South Africa has been depicted in racial and economic terms, with reports and statistics highlighting that the prevalence of GBV is low amongst the wealthy quantile and highest amongst the poor and less privileged (StatsSA, 2020). Language of communication and choice of words when reporting such matters become of paramount importance.

According to Bertram & Christiansen (2014), sampling involves deciding which people, settings, events, or behaviours to include in the study. Non-probability sampling was the most appropriate method for this study because it allowed the researcher, to judge which sample or events to be used (Cohen et al., 2011). Non-probability sampling is typical in qualitative research methods for which statistical inference is not desired (Bricks, 2015). According to Uprichard (2013), non-probability sampling attempts to deduce conclusions about a larger population under study through a selected sample or subset of the population.

The most common type of non-probability sampling method is purposive sampling. This study applied purposive sampling based on Schutt (2006), who proposed that it is used in both qualitative and mixed methods approach. According to Schutt (2006), purposive sampling involves an iterative process of selecting research subjects rather than starting with a predetermined sampling frame. In this case, out of the approximately 150 community newspapers circulating in KZN, the researcher preferred the English publications because of their language suitability. Purposive sampling was used to select only the English community newspapers suitable for this study. Most of the English community newspapers are not distributed in most peri-urban areas probably because they may not be suitable for the kind of audience in those communities.

Selection of publications

Geographical area

The motivation for selecting KwaZulu-Natal as the area of study was founded upon the following conditions: Out of the 30 identified GBV hotspots in South Africa from 2020 to 2022, nine of these hotspots; Plessislaer, Ntuzuma, Eshowe, KwaDukuza, KwaMashu, Inanda, Empangeni, Umlazi and Osizweni, are spread across the province of study KwaZulu-Natal. It is therefore important to understand the kind of messaging on GBV being transmitted by these selected community newspapers as they are the more accessible, influential and a readily available source of information for most of these communities as compared to other sources of communication such as SABC TV and radio which requires specific gadgets to access the information. Despite the dominance of advertisements in community newspapers in terms of content ratio, the little space available for covering other issues such as GBV remains critical because that little information disseminated can be crucial in raising awareness of this scourge. KwaZulu-Natal is a province regarded as highly patriarchal hence it was interesting to scrutinise the descriptive and emotive words used in GBV related stories by community newspapers when reporting on such issues. Lastly, no extensive research has been done to date on KZN community newspapers, focussing on how language, and word choice contributes to framing and agenda-setting in the reporting of GBV in KZN community newspapers.

The nine identified GBV hotspots in the province of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, as shown by the KZN district schematic map below, were selected for this study through purposive sampling. These areas were ranked among the top 30 GBV hotspots in South Africa from 2020 to 2022. Plessislaer is located in the KZN Midlands, uMgungundlovu District under the Msunduzi Municipality. Inanda is a township north-west of Durban, in the eThekweni District and is under the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality. KwaMashu is a township in the district of eThekweni, north of Durban, under the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality. Ntuzuma is a township north of Durban, in the eThekweni District, under the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality and also Umlazi situated south-west of Durban is a township in the eThekweni District under the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality. Osizweni is a township located in the Amajuba District in northern KZN, under the Newcastle Local Municipality. KwaDukuza is situated in the ILembe District Municipality under the KwaDukuza Local Municipality.

Lastly, Empangeni and Eshowe are both located the same district municipality of King Cetshwayo in the north-eastern parts of KZN though under different local municipalities. Empangeni is under the uMhlathuze local municipality and Eshowe is under the uMlalazi local municipality. It is important to note that of the nine identified GBV hotspots in KZN from 2020 to 2022, four of them, Kwamashu, Inanda, Ntuzuma and Umlazi all fall under the same district and municipality of eThekweni and eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, and two GBV hotspots of Empangeni and Eshowe are in the same district municipality of King Cetshwayo.

Schematic map of KZN



Publication language, ownership and availability

The province of KZN has more than 150 community newspapers in circulation mostly listed under three major media companies: Caxton and CPT Publishers and Printers Limited, Associated of Independent Publishers (AIP) and Tabloid Media. Caxton Media owns 33 community newspapers in KZN i.e., 25 English language and eight IsiZulu newspapers, AIP owns 35 community newspapers in KZN i.e., sixteen English language, sixteen IsiZulu, two bilingual and one isiXhosa language newspapers. Lastly, Tabloid Media owns twelve community newspapers in KZN, nine printed in English and three in Isizulu. The two dominant languages of publication are the English language with 50 out of 80 the community newspapers and 27 are in Isizulu language. The three publications selected for this study are owned by Caxton Media because they were readily available online and upon request from the publishers, while other publications that could have been selected were not available online and the publishers were not helpful when requested for assistance to obtain hard copies from them.

At the conception of this study, the initial research design was to conduct this study on all the community newspapers in KZN circulated during the period of study-November 2021 to December 2022. This would have included a sample of approximately plus or minus 150 community newspapers, translating to about 600+ publications per month, which could have translated to an expected total of nearly 7 200 possible stories on GBV if every publication could have posted a GBV related story every week during the period of study.

It was decided to limit the sample size to suitable English community newspapers mainly circulated in the nine identified GBV hotspots in the province. The majority of the community newspapers circulated in some of the identified GBV hotspots in KwaZulu-Natal, are published in the vernacular language, IsiZulu, therefore language barrier was cited as the researcher is not proficient in isiZulu. Translation of articles from isiZulu to English was therefore beyond the scope of this research project.

Non-probability sampling was therefore applied when deciding on the final sample for the study. The *South Coast Sun* was selected to cover Ntuzuma, KwaMashu and Umlazi because of its close proximity to these three areas. For the area of Osizweni, the English newspaper

distributed in that area, the *Newcastle Express* was not available online during the data collection phase and after numerous efforts to get the assistance from the publisher Tabloid Media, they were unable to avail the required information or hard copies. For areas such as KwaDukuza and Inanda, the English newspapers circulated in these areas such as the *Stanger Weekly* were also not available online during the data collection period hence the final sample contains only three community newspapers covering the remaining areas.

In instances where two or more English community newspapers are distributed in the same area, the researcher decided to select the one with the highest number of readerships for example, in Empangeni and Eshowe where the *Zululand Observer* and *Eyethu Bay Watch*. For the areas of Ntuzuma, Umlazi, Ntuzuma and KwaMashu, the *South Coast Sun* was preferred to stand in as a representative sample publication because it is the only English community newspaper close to these three areas.

All the three publications are English language community newspapers with the *Maritzburg Echo* serving Plessislaer, *Zululand Observer* serving Empangeni and Eshowe; and the *South Coast Sun* representing Ntuzuma, KwaMashu, and Umlazi. As mentioned earlier, these three community newspapers were intentionally selected because their areas of circulation recorded worsening GBV rankings from 2020 to 2022. The *Maritzburg Echo* is circulated in Plessislaer, which was ranked 29th in 2020 and moved to 6th in 2022. The *Zululand Observer* is circulated in areas such as Empangeni and Eshowe, with Empangeni being ranked 9th in 2020 and moving to 4th in 2022. Eshowe ranked at 10th place in 2022 but was not listed as a GBV hotspot in 2020. The *South Coast Sun* was intentionally selected because it is one of the English community newspapers circulating within the peripheries of GBV hotspots such as Ntuzuma, Umlazi, and KwaMashu, all of which were identified as GBV hotspots in KZN during the period of study, 2021 to 2022.

Selection of articles

All articles dealing with GBV published in the selected newspapers during the period of study, November 2021 to December 2022, were considered in the sample. The sample is comprised of a total of 145 GBV-related stories, i.e., 73 stories from the *Zululand Observer*, 39 stories from the *Maritzburg Echo* and 33 stories from the *South Coast Sun*. The researcher

decided on further categorising these 145 identified GBV related stories into three distinct sub-categories namely; awareness-based stories, incident-based stories and uplifting stories. This was achieved by looking at narrative similarities within the stories.

Out of the three identified sub-categories, the researcher decided to focus on incident-based stories for the thematic analysis because they contained the emotive and descriptive words that the study was seeking, to comprehend how they were used. Incident-based stories were also best placed to respond to the key theories such as framing and agenda-setting used for this study and they also provided context of the story, in some instances through witness or victim/survivor statements, which are important in understanding gender-based violence in-depth. By focussing on incident-based stories, the researcher was able to identify the form of GBV perpetrated as shown by *table 1* below i.e., whether it was physical, sexual, emotional, harassment, structural or property damage, intimidation, and/or stalking. This helped in formulating themes that were discussed in this study. A total of 72 stories from the 145 GBV related stories were classified as incident-based stories i.e., 38 of these stories were posted in the *Zululand Observer*, 22 stories were posted in the *Maritzburg Echo*, and twelve stories were posted in the *South Coast Sun* during the period of study November 2021 to December 2022.

TABLE 1: GENDER-BASED-VIOLENCE BYTYPE

	RAPE	ABDUCTION-RAPE	RAPE-MURDER	ABDUCTION	SEXUAL-ASSAULT	ASSAULT-GBH	ABUSE	MURDER	ATTEPTED MURDER	CONVICTION	TOTAL
ZO	4	1	5	1	1	2	3	16	2	5	40
ME	5	0	3	1	1	1	0	10	1	0	22
SCS	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	7	0	1	12

The intended aim of a text goes a long way in informing word choice. In news writing the aim is often to inform the reader about a particular issue or incident, and to persuade the reader to understand the story from a particular viewpoint. The use of emotive words or language is intended to make the audience emotionally involved with the story, whereas descriptive words help the audience engage with the story. In stories that are GBV-related, the choice of words in describing or reporting on such issues is critical because this can affect the

interpretation and meanings that can reflect on the seriousness of the issue being discussed, or it can just generalise the issue. Hence the objective of this study was to determine the type of descriptive and emotive words used in the reporting of GBV in order to determine how such word choice and framing laid out the issue of GBV in terms of the media agenda-setting.

Data Analysis

Introduction

Wong (2008) defines data analysis in qualitative research as the process of systematically searching and arranging the observation notes, interview transcripts, textual and non-textual material that the researcher accumulates to increase the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Qualitative analysis was used to explain the quantitative findings further; that is, both the quantitative and qualitative data were integrated to explain the study results.

The first step in meeting the research objectives involved assembling and quantifying data on GBV through content analysis. The quantified data was then interpreted through a thematic analysis by looking at word choice and establishing themes or patterns that stood out from the content analysis process. This helped in highlighting how these word choices contributed to framing and agenda-setting in the reporting of GBV in KZN community newspapers. It also enabled the researcher to compare the two time periods of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign in 2021 and 2022 and identify the changes that may have occurred in the reporting of GBV in KZN community newspapers during that period.

This study used the mixed method approach. Bowen (2009) recommended that content analysis be used as a first-pass document review that can provide the researcher a means of identifying meaningful and relevant passages or themes. Bowen (2009) then emphasised that a thematic analysis can be considered a form of pattern recognition with the study data. This means taking emerging themes from the content analysis and making them into categories used for further analysis through thematic analysis.

Content analysis

Quantitative data analysis is a systematic process of collecting and evaluating measurable and verifiable data (Creswell, 2007). The quantitative approach permits the researcher to methodically classify, sum up, and explain observations in what can be referred to as

descriptive statistics. A content analysis on 184 community newspapers copies was carried out for this study, that is, 68 copies from the *Zululand Observer*, 58 copies from the *Maritzburg Echo*, and 58 copies from the *South Coast Sun* published during the period of study from November 2021 to December 2022. This resulted in a total of 145 GBV-related stories being identified.

A further content analysis of the 145 stories was carried out through an emic/etic and inductive approach, which resulted in three sub-categories emerging, which resulted in 72 incident-based stories, 52 awareness-based stories and eighteen uplifting stories being identified. From this data set gathered, framing was looked at in terms of page position, follow-up stories, images use, story frequency, story priority and sources used as part of the content analysis process. All these aspects of framing are important because they put into perspective the agenda-setting process and highlight the importance placed on GBV related stories and, by extension, touch on the aspects of newsworthiness and news values.

The 72 incident-based stories that the researcher preferred as a final unit of analysis were subjected to further content analysis as a primary goal for identifying descriptive and emotive word choice and phrases that highlights GBV in KZN community newspapers. Descriptive words in the instance of GBV incident-based stories analysed, are words that gives the reader more information about the specific case of GBV being highlighted by the writer and help the reader gain a better understanding of the issue when reading. Emotive words are a specific diction of words deliberately used by the writer to evoke emotions in the reader. The identified words were assigned into each category using the Systematic Functional Linguistic (SFL) dimension of appraisal, which emphasises functionality of language in social contexts. The core concepts of SFL looks at language as functional and language as meaning-making (Halliday, 1978). According to the concept of language as meaning-making, speakers and writers have a systematic choice of words in a particular context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), an approach that this study applied in identifying the descriptive and emotive words used in GBV related stories analysed.

Berelson (1952) defined quantitative content analysis as a research technique for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. This empowered this study understand how frequently certain word choices on GBV were

used therefore enabling the researcher to identify emerging themes based on how these words were used. This process therefore allowed the researcher to reach at general conclusions through inductive reasoning which incorporated all the emerging themes identified.

Thematic analysis

This study adopted an inductive approach, which emphasised on generating new theories and conceptual understanding (Bryman, 2012). An inductive approach derives themes from the researcher's data and offers a broader analysis of the entire body of data (Varpio et al., 2012). According to McMillian & Schumacher (2014), the inductive approach begins with specific observations of raw data and moves to generalisations, patterns and theories. An inductive analysis means the recognised themes are strongly related to the data.

Qualitative research being largely inductive is suitable for describing a phenomenon in detail but at the same time, etic systems can be imposed on the same data. According to Mostowlansky & Rota (2020), etic systems rely on a generalised classification system devised by the researcher in advance for the study of any culture in order to compare and classify behavioural data-descriptive and emotive words. This means qualitative data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass-collected data. This type of analysis looks mainly at what the quantitative data says and aims to identify patterns or themes within the data. . Rice & Lizzy (1999) explain thematic analysis as a process that involves the identification of themes through careful reading and re-reading of the data. In other words, it is a way of discovering patterns within the data where the emerging themes become the categories for analysis.

In conducting the thematic analysis, the 72 incident-based stories identified were carefully read and re-read one by one, precisely selecting all descriptive and emotive words and phrases used in the reporting of GBV. These identified words and phrases were then grouped according to similarity, meaning and the connotations they carry. According to GBV Core Concepts (2017), fundamental concepts of GBV such as sex, gender, violence, abuse, coercion, consent, power, harm, and human rights, were used by the researcher as a guide to formulate the best possible five themes that stood out based on the group of words or phrases classified together according to their similarities, meaning and connotation. The five themes that emerged were of; *violence, fear, gruesomeness, suffering, and crime and justice*. In the

context of this study, violence is understood as the intentional use of physical force, threatened or actual, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (WHO,2002), whereas gruesomeness is understood as a depiction of extreme violence that encompasses disturbing and horrifying imagery that are extremely unpleasant (The Content Authority, 2023), such as mutilated, dismembered or bodies burnt beyond recognition in acts of GBV. Suffering can be distinguished from fear by that, suffering is when painful emotions are activated in response to a difficult circumstance (University of Hampshire, 2023), whereas fear arises from the threat of harm, either physical, emotional or psychological, real or imagined (Paul Ekman Group, 2023). The themes of violence vs gruesomeness and fear vs suffering are interconnected as one is a broader category and the latter is a specific category of the former.

Rigour And Trustworthiness

One central benchmark of mixed research methods is the integration of data. According to Brown et. al (2015), integration is the purposeful mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods which can occur at different phases of the research process, that is, data collection, analysis, interpretation and discussion. To ensure rigour and trustworthiness of this study, the researcher firstly used the triangulation method. Andrew & Halcomb (2009) views the triangulation process as a way of ensuring validity of the findings through comprehensiveness and the convergence of patterns, internal agreement: one method is expected to compensate for the weakness of another. Secondly, the study adopted situated trustworthiness where trustworthiness requires that the researcher must have a sharp awareness of their own standpoint, particularly in relation to their own culture and history.

A self-reflexivity section was written as it was essential to highlight the researcher's own position, bias, prejudices and commitments. There is an emerging consensus that research of a higher quality will be generated by tapping "the breadth of the quantitative approach and the depth of the qualitative approach" (Carvalho & White, 1997) rather than relying on one or the other method. Finally, using a mixed method approach in this study was important in providing a better understanding of the research problems and also provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of GBV looked at, and also helped in making this study more persuasive and compelling.

Self-Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an essential component of research, particularly in qualitative research. According to Fook, cited in Askeland & Bradley (2007), reflexivity in research is an ability to recognise how our specific social and cultural background influences the research setting and the knowledge we create. In addressing issues relating to the researcher's emotional involvement with the research subject, the emic/etic approach addresses epistemological and methodological issues such as the relationship between the researcher and the research subject was also used to maintain objectivity of the study. Growing up as a young man in rural Zimbabwe, witnessing first-hand the scars of gender-based violence perpetrated on my female relatives and other women in the community, it became a normal and "acceptable" way of life to witness men asserting control and manhood over women by any means possible.

According to May & Perry (2017), reflexivity requires an explicit self-consciousness and self-assessment by the researcher about their positions and how this might, may, or have directly or indirectly influenced the design, execution, and interpretation of the research data findings. As this dissertation has not been written in the first person, it is important to highlight that only this section of self-reflexivity has been written in the first person as it is a personal reflection of my personal experiences as the researcher. Positionality acknowledges and recognises that I as a researcher, am part of the social world that I am researching and that other social actors have already interpreted this world. Being aware of my own position and background has helped me approach this study with an open mind and awareness of my biases-both culturally and intellectually.

Listening and seeing how my own family elders and community leaders responded to GBV, I grew up confused, torn between the lines of not comprehending what is intimate partner violence, domestic violence and overall GBV, and the consequences of such acts on the victims because men's actions were always justified in every case of GBV perpetrated. During the course of the study, there were moments when I was overcome with emotions because I realised that by remaining silent, I subtly became part of the narrative of normalising GBV. Myself being a part of a society and culture that normalises GBV and views women's abuse as a corrective measure that men can use to control 'dissenting' women is shameful and a hard pill to swallow.

The experiences I went through inevitably have a bearing on this study; hence it was necessary to self-reflect to acknowledge and disclose my personal connection to this research, seeking to understand my part in it or influence on it, as this helped me to avoid bias. Also, as a father raising two young girls, the fear of what lies ahead is inevitable, given the circumstances I grew up witnessing and the society we live in. To ensure a quality and credible outcome, I took measures to ascertain my position, avoid bias, and be objective. To avoid bias, I used a mixed method approach, different sample sources such as three different community newspapers spread across the province of KwaZulu-Natal, i.e., the *Zululand Observer* circulated in the north-eastern part of the province, *South Coast Sun* in the southern part and *Maritzburg Echo* in the Midlands area of the province. In addition, objectivity in this research was also achieved through how the research questions are framed.

The research questions for this study are designed to limit the interference of my personal experiences. The study specifically focuses on exploring how framing and word choice contributes to agenda-setting in reporting GBV in KZN community newspapers. This helps myself as the researcher to avoid my own position and personal circumstances, which may lead to bias and subjectivity. However, it is clear that no matter how much self-reflexive practice I as the researcher engages in, there will still be some form of bias and subjectivity. This study has helped me realise that I can be the agent of change as I now possess the ability to speak out against GBV, enforce change or behaviour of other men through researching and writing on GBV, and advocating for more visibility and education in the media on matters relating to GBV.

Ethical Considerations

According to Marianna (2011), research ethics are a foundation for conducting compelling and evocative research and comprises requirements for daily work, protecting subjects' dignity, and publishing the information in the analysis. This study is desktop research involving information already in the public domain. Ethical clearance was applied for and granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal ethics committee.

Limitations

Community newspapers in KZN are published in different languages, some bilingual and or trilingual. A significant limitation for this study was that only community newspapers published in English or GBV-related stories written in English were considered for this study because the researcher does not understand the other languages, such as isiZulu and Afrikaans, used by some of the publications. This language limitation translates to a smaller sample size, which could mean that the data collected could have been insufficient. As KZN's widely used language is isiZulu, most community newspapers circulated in the nine identified GBV hotspots are published in isiZulu. The failure to include isiZulu publications due to a language barrier cited could mean some critical information could have been side-lined, neglected or not considered, as there is a richness of meaning, comprehension and a better understanding of a phenomenon when the language used in presenting such events is a local dialect understood by the majority of the population in the area of study.

The descriptive and emotive words used in the GBV-related stories that this study looked at, the context, narrative and circumstances surrounding a given story, may have a depth of meaning if given in a local dialect, in this instance, isiZulu. Secondly, the researcher was not able to access English community newspapers such as the *Newcastle Express* and *Stanger Weekly* which covers GBV hotspots such as Osizweni, KwaDukuza and Inanda, respectively, because they were not available online during the data collection process and efforts to get assistance from the publisher Tabloid Media were fruitless. Lastly, the researcher's bias is always a challenge to qualitative research since the researcher inevitably brings his history and preconceived perceptions about the studied topic into the analysis. Objective and generalisable results and conclusions are thus a challenge in qualitative research.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

This study explores how framing and word choice contributes to agenda-setting in the reporting of gender-based violence in three KwaZulu-Natal community newspapers focussing on the descriptive and emotive words used to highlight GBV in the stories posted during the period of study from November 2021 to December 2022. The three community newspapers selected for this study are the *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun*. This chapter is divided into three sections.

The first section discusses the framing of the newspaper articles on GBV in terms of story category, story frequency, story priority, image use and sources. The second section then looks at word choice in the selected incident-based articles. The choice of words shapes the predominant theme in each story, which in turn frames the story in a particular way. The last section examines the articles posted during the 16 Days of Activism campaigns of November to December 2021 and November to December 2022.

The discussions presented in this chapter have emerged from the data gathered from the three community newspapers, *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun*, from November 2021 to December 2022. The sample size comprises all GBV-related stories published during this period. This sample comprised a total of 145 GBV-related stories; 73 stories from the *Zululand Observer*, 39 stories from the *Maritzburg Echo* and 33 stories from the *South Coast Sun*. These stories were then grouped according to similarity into three major categories.

Firstly, ‘incident-based’ stories include rape, sexual assault, abuse, murder, convictions, grievous bodily harm and kidnapping, all of which fall under the broad GBV categories of physical and psychological abuse. The second category is ‘awareness-based’ stories, including GBV marches, protests, crime statistics and educational stories. The third category is based on ‘uplifting’ stories, which include donations to GBV-related causes and survivor stories. For the discussion on framing in the first part of the chapter, all 145 stories across the three categories were examined. The discussion of word choice and themes was then limited

to those stories in the ‘incident-based’ category, as these generated the richest data in terms of helping identify the descriptive and emotive words used in the reporting of gender-based violence.

Framing Of Gender-Based Violence News Stories

Introduction

According to Druckman (2001c) and Scheufele (1999), the term ‘frame’ in communication or media studies refers to the words, images, phrases and presentation style that the speaker uses when relaying information about an issue or event. Entman (1993) notes that journalistic texts can make information more noticeable, meaningful or memorable through its placement, for example, which page it appears on and what stories are nearby; by repeating it, as in having a follow-on story; or by associating it with familiar symbols such as hashtags and the 16 Days of Activism campaign. Iyengar (1991) and Price et al. (1997) further reiterated that individual opinion is significantly affected by exposure to certain frames.

As indicated in *table 1* on page 83, frames such as story priority-indicated by the page on which the story appears, follow-on stories, word choice and story source, and story prevalence, therefore, help the reader as an indication of the importance of the story covered. This chapter will examine the GBV stories appearing in the *Maritzburg Echo*, the *Zululand Observer* and the *South Coast Sun* in terms of the following frames: story category, frequency, priority, and image use. The data from each publication is first described, then the frames are discussed comparatively.

Three primary story categories were identified, i.e., ‘incident-based’ stories, ‘awareness-based’ stories, and ‘uplifting’ stories. The stories were examined in terms of story prevalence which counted the overall number of GBV-related stories published across the three newspapers. Particular attention was paid to November to December 2021 and November to December 2022, which covers the annual 16 Days of Activism campaigns. The next frame examined was story priority which focused on the story's placement in terms of the page number on which it appears, the space allocated to each story, and the number of stories with follow-on articles. Story frequency then looked at the number of weeks in which a GBV-related story was published and the overall weekly totals of the published stories. The use of

images was examined regarding the number of stories associated with an image, and finally, the use of sources was explored.

Description of the framing data

Zululand Observer

For the *Zululand Observer*, for the period November 2021 to December 2022, an overall total of 73 GBV-related stories were recorded. The stories were grouped into three distinct categories, which showed that 40 of the stories were incident-based, 23 were awareness-based, and ten were uplifting stories. Most GBV-related stories appeared to be published in the middle and end of the month, i.e., 24 and nineteen stories, respectively.¹ Regarding GBV related story frequency, the researcher paid special attention to the period leading up to commemorating the 16 Days of Activism, i.e., November to December 2021 and November to December 22. A total of fifteen GBV-related stories were published from November to December 2021. Eight stories are awareness-based, five incident-based, and two are uplifting stories. From November to December 2022, fourteen GBV-related stories were recorded, i.e., six awareness-based, five incident-based, and three uplifting stories. It is also important to acknowledge that five conviction stories were published during the same time period.

Looking at story frequency, similarities were noted for the two-time periods of November to December 2021 and November to December 2022 in terms of the overall number of stories. Out of 64 weeks of publication, for 41 weeks, a GBV-related story was posted in the publication. Regarding story priority, focussing on pages one to four, four headline stories were posted, i.e., they were front page news, ten stories appeared on page two, twelve stories appeared on page three, and eight stories appeared on page four. A total of 25 GBV-related stories were recorded within the first three pages. Five follow-on stories were also recorded, which means the same story was repeated more than once due to some interesting developments in that story.

During the overall period of study, the *Zululand Observer* posted a total of twelve stories in week one, 24 in week two, sixteen in week three, nineteen in week four and two stories in week five, respectively. Out of the 73 stories, 52 stories included an image. Of the stories

¹ in some months, five publications were produced in the same month hence it is recorded as the 5th week.

with an image, nineteen of the images were of the victims, three were of the perpetrators of GBV, and 30 images were of government officials, local political representatives, community members, and family members of the victim commenting on or protesting over the crime perpetrated. Out of the 40 incident-based stories recorded, nineteen contained an image of the victim, thirteen had no image, and eight had images of either local political or government figures, family or community members and members of non-governmental organisations leading a march against gender-based violence. Of the incident-based cases recorded, the most dominant form of GBV identified were sixteen direct murders, five rape-murder cases, where the victim was raped first and then murdered, and four rape cases, where the victim was raped and not murdered.

Maritzburg Echo

For the *Maritzburg Echo*, for the period November 2021 to December 2022, the following observations were made. An overall total of 39 GBV-related stories were recorded. The stories were grouped into three distinct categories, which showed that 22 were incident-based, thirteen were awareness-based, and four were uplifting stories respectively. Most GBV-related stories appeared to be published in the middle and end of the month, i.e., fourteen and nine stories respectively. Regarding story frequency, the researcher paid special attention to the time period encompassing the 16 Days of Activism Campaign, i.e., November to December 2021 and November to December 2022. Nine GBV-related stories were recorded between November and December 2021, i.e., five incident-based, three awareness-based, and one uplifting story. For November to December 2022, ten stories were recorded, i.e., four incident-based, five awareness-based, and one uplifting story respectively.

Similarities in terms of story category and the number of stories posted during the two time periods covering the 16 Days of Activism were noted in the *Maritzburg Echo* during the period of study from November 2021 to December 2022. For 24 weeks out of 58 weeks of publication, a GBV-related story was posted. It is important to note that no conviction story was recorded in the *Maritzburg Echo* during the overall period of study from November 2021 to December 2022.

In terms of story priority, paying attention to the pages on which a GBV-related story appears in the publication, the following observations were made, focussing on the first four pages of

the *Maritzburg Echo*. Four headline stories were posted, i.e., front page news, nine stories appeared on page two, six stories appeared on page three, and ten stories appeared on page four respectively. Four follow-on stories were recorded during the period of study. Of the 39 stories recorded, seventeen included an image. Of the 22 incident-based stories, seven contained an image, i.e., five stories have an image of the victim, one has the image of a perpetrator, and one had an image of either a local political figure or a provincial government official, family or community members and advocacy groups commenting or marching against GBV related issues. On the incident-based stories posted, the three dominant forms of GBV noted were ten direct murders, three rape-murders, and five rape stories.

South Coast Sun

For the *South Coast Sun*, from November 2021 to December 2022, 33 GBV-related stories were recorded. In terms of story category, the stories were arranged into three distinct groups, which showed that twelve stories were incident-based; seventeen were awareness-based, and four were uplifting stories respectively. Most GBV-related stories appeared to be published during the third and fourth week, i.e., eight and fourteen stories were posted respectively. Twelve incident-based stories were recorded, i.e., seven direct murders, three rape stories, and one sexual assault story. Regarding story frequency in the *South Coast Sun*, the researcher paid attention to the 16 Days of Activism campaign period, i.e., the two periods of November to December 2021 and November to December 2022.

Eight stories were recorded from November to December 2021, i.e., seven were awareness-based, one was incident-based, and no uplifting story was recorded. For the period of November to December 2022, five GBV-related stories were recorded, i.e., two awareness-based, two uplifting and one incident-based story respectively. One conviction story was published in the *South Coast Sun* during the whole period under study from November 2021 to December 2022. A sharp decline in awareness-based stories was noted in the *South Coast Sun* from seven in November to December 2021 to two in November to December 2022. For 23 out of 58 weeks of print, a GBV-related story was posted in the *South Coast Sun*.

In terms of story priority focussing on the first four pages in which the GBV-related stories appeared in the publication, it was noted that four stories appeared on page one, i.e., they were front page news, nine stories were posted on page two, six stories were posted on page

three and nine stories were posted on page four respectively. A total of four follow-on stories were posted during the period of study. Out of the total 33 stories posted in the *South Coast Sun*, 21 stories included an image. Of the twelve incident-based stories recorded, six included an image i.e., four images were of the victims, one image of a perpetrator, and one image of a police spokesperson.

Discussion of framing of news articles on gender-based violence

To appreciate how framing works, all the GBV-related stories posted in the three publications were meticulously analysed. Framing was then approached through the lenses of rhetorical devices such as story category, frequency of stories, story priority, and images contained in the stories. These rhetorical devices were used to convince readers of the value of any given position. According to the University of Edinburgh (2022), “these frames select certain aspects of a perceived reality to make it more noticeable...”. These identified frames are essential in a story because they may cause the audience to think more about the issue of gender-based violence and see how important it is as a social problem. This section will also discuss the sources used by journalists as they are important in giving the story a different angle and gaining insights into people’s reactions, opinions and prevailing mental attitudes around the event.

Discussion of story categories

Looking at framing through the lenses of story category, a group total of 145 stories as indicated in *table 2* below, were posted across the three newspapers i.e., 73 stories in the *Zululand Observer*, 39 stories in the *Maritzburg Echo* and 33 stories in the *South Coast Sun*. The stories were then grouped according to similarities of the message contained, and three distinct categories, namely: incident-based, awareness-based and uplifting stories, were formulated. The *Zululand Observer* posted 40 incident-based stories, 23 awareness-based stories and ten uplifting stories. The *Maritzburg Echo* posted 22 incident-based stories, thirteen awareness-based stories and four uplifting stories. The *South Coast Sun* posted twelve incident-based stories, seventeen awareness-based stories, and four uplifting stories.

Looking at this story category breakdown, the *Zululand Observer* posted more stories in all categories three categories than the *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun* combined-as indicated in *table 2* below. This is attributed to an established working relationship between

the publication and Lifeline Zululand, an NGO dealing with GBV-related incidences in areas such as Empangeni and Eshowe, also identified as GBV hotspots. Lifeline Zululand is, therefore, accredited for supplying the *Zululand Observer* with most of the GBV-related stories published during the period of study.

TABLE 2: STORY CATEGORY BREAKDOWN

STORY CATEGORY	ZO	ME	SCS	TOTAL
INCIDENT-BASED	40	22	12	74
AWARENESS	23	13	17	53
UPLIFTING	10	4	4	18
TOTAL	73	39	33	145

Of the three community newspapers under study, the *South Coast Sun* posted the overall lowest number of GBV-related stories during the period of study from November 2021 to December 2022. However, the *South Coast Sun* surpassed the *Maritzburg Echo* on the total number of awareness-based stories, which are important in raising awareness and educating the audiences on gender-based violence. Lastly, on uplifting stories posted, the *Zululand Observer* posted ten, and *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun* posted four stories each, respectively. The uplifting stories are stories by survivors of GBV who found the courage to speak out against the perpetrators of GBV and the abuse they suffered, with the support of organisations such as Lifeline Zululand as a way of motivating and inspiring other silent victims to speak out or seek help.

Discussion of story frequency

A group total of 145 GBV-related stories were posted during the period of study from November 2021 to December 2022. Looking at story frequency using the page numbers on (as indicated in *table 3* below) which GBV-related stories were posted in the publications during the entire period of study, the following observations were made: the *Zululand Observer* posted a total of 73 stories, i.e., 34 stories appeared between pages 1-4, sixteen stories appeared between pages 5-8, nine stories appeared between pages 9-12, three stories each appeared between pages 13-16 and 17-20 respectively, two stories appeared on pages

21-24, one story appeared between pages 25-28, and five stories appeared between pages 29-32. The *Maritzburg Echo* posted a total of 39 stories i.e., 29 stories appeared between pages 1-4, three stories appeared between pages 5-8, no story appeared between pages 9-12, three stories each appeared between pages 13-16, and 17-20 respectively, one story appeared on pages 21-24 and no GBV-related story appeared on page ranges 25-28 and 29-32 respectively. A total of 33 GBV-related stories were posted in the *South Coast Sun* i.e., 28 stories appeared on page range 1-4, three stories appeared between pages 5-8, one story each appeared on page range 9-12 and 13-16 respectively, and no GBV-related stories were recorded on page range 17-20, 21-24, 25-28 and 29-32 respectively.

TABLE 3: PAGE FREQUENCY

PAGE		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
NUMBER OF STORIES POSTED	ZO	4	10	12	8	8	6	0	2	0	4	2	3	0	2	1	0	0	3	0	0
	ME	4	9	6	10	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	1
	SCS	4	9	6	9	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS		12	28	24	27	11	9	0	2	0	4	2	4	0	3	2	2	0	4	1	1

TABLE 3: PAGE FREQUENCY Continued

PAGE		21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
NUMBER OF STORIES POSTED	ZO	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	1	1
	ME	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	SCS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS		1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	1	1

Looking at the 16 Days of Activism campaign period of November to December 2021 and November to December 2022, 42% of all the GBV-related stories considered for this study were published. An average of five stories per week were posted in the *Zululand Observer* during the campaign period of November to December 2021, and an average of four stories per week from November to December 2022. For the *Maritzburg Echo*, an average of three stories per week were posted during both campaign periods of November to December 2021

and November to December 2022, respectively. For the *South Coast Sun*, an average of four stories per week were posted during the campaign period of November to December 2021 and an average of 2 stories per week from November to December 2022.

For the months of January to October, the *Zululand Observer* averaged four stories per month as compared to an overall average of about seven stories per week during both campaign periods of November to December 2021 and 2022. The *Maritzburg Echo* averaged two stories per month between January and October 2022 as compared to a weekly average of five stories per week during the campaign period of November to December 2021 and 2022. The *South Coast Sun* averaged a total of two stories per month between January and October 2022 as compared to a weekly average of four stories per week from November to December 2021 and two stories per week from November to December 2022. From this analysis, it is evident that the frequency of GBV-related stories across the three publications is concentrated during the 16 Days of Activism campaign period as compared to the other months during the course of the year.

Discussion of story priority

Newspapers play a critical role in presenting a selection of the day's events to their communities, and each day's news presents a set of perspectives of the most important happenings to their public (Utt & Pasternack, 2003). The most important placement to find such a representation of society's most critical events is a newspaper's front page. According to McQuail (2010), the first page of the newspaper grabs a reader's attention. Thus editors spend more time and energy determining which story elements should be placed on the most important page of their publication. Reisner (1992) highlighted that the front page of the newspaper is the most important page of the publication and highlights the day or week's most important stories.

On story priority, the first four pages of each publication were considered to see how many GBV-related stories appeared on these pages. The first four pages are significant because stories with ongoing themes are more likely to be integrated into these pages. Audiences also tend to assign importance to a story through its page placement and packaging hence taking a close look at the first four pages. Also, in most newspapers, from page four onwards, they tend to focus more on features, sports stories and advertisements. However, more attention

was put on the first page because audiences tend to focus on front-page stories rather than stories published elsewhere in the newspaper (Min-Mid Publications, 1984).

For all three publications being studied, that is, the *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and the *South Coast Sun*, four headline stories were posted in each newspaper respectively during the period of study from November 2021 to December 2022. This means these stories were front-page news and appeared on the first page. This is important in that front page news visually suggests to the readers what the news outlet considers to be the most important story of the week. On page two, the *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun* posted seven stories each, and the *Zululand Observer* posted ten stories. On page three, the *Maritzburg Echo* posted eight, *Zululand Observer* eleven and *South Coast Sun* six stories, respectively.

Pages two, three, and four are also important because they show the degree of priority and value placed on a story by the publications. However, looking at the first four pages does not imply that any GBV-related stories published after page four are unimportant. Regarding framing and agenda-setting, most GBV incident-based, and follow-on stories were posted on pages one to four and most awareness-based and uplifting stories were posted from page four onwards. Interestingly, all stories published in the *Zululand Observer* from page range 25-32 were all awareness-based stories posted during the 16 Days of Activism campaign period. Also, in the *Maritzburg Echo*, all stories published from pages 14-24 were awareness-based.

Lastly, *Zululand Observer* allocated an overall approximate average of 34% of the page to GBV-related stories posted. Stories on the themes of gruesomeness and violence received more page space than any other GBV-related stories posted during the period of study. In the *Maritzburg Echo*, an overall approximate average of 31% of the page was allocated to GBV-related stories posted. Stories on the theme of violence were allocated more page space than any other GBV-related stories posted during the period of study. In the *South Coast Sun*, approximately 28% of the page was allocated to GBV-related stories posted. Stories with the theme of violence were allocated more page space than any other GBV-related stories published from November 2021 to December 2022.

Discussion of image use

The inclusion of images has an added advantage for the comprehension of a story as they communicate meanings immediately. Mirzoeff (1999) highlighted that ‘images impose meaning at one stroke without the need to analyse it’. According to Sontag (2003), images are an ‘invitation to pay attention’ to the presented story. Joffe (2008) added that photographs are images that can be said to portray the reality of a situation very directly. In other words, images are capable of evoking and stimulating emotional responses from the viewers. The following observations on image use were made in the three publications under study. All the online images of the GBV-related stories considered for this study were posted in colour by the three publications.

All the publications used professionally taken images. These images connected well with the story content presented. The publications used images of varying sizes. In terms of image size, overall, the *Maritzburg Echo* used smaller images than the story itself. Most images were positioned at the beginning and bottom of the story, with a few instances where the image was placed within the story. Bigger images were used if they were placed at the beginning of the story, while much smaller images were used if placed within the story, and slightly bigger images were used if placed at the bottom of the story. For the *South Coast Sun* most of the images were of similar size to the story presented.

Most of the images were placed at the end of the story with a few placed at the beginning of or within the story. The images placed within the story were of a much smaller size than those placed at the beginning or end of the story. For the *Zululand Observer*, the images used in most instances were much bigger and dominant but well positioned within the story to create a visually appealing presentation. Most of the images were placed at the bottom of the story and in some instances at the beginning of the story. In instances where the images were placed within the story, they were of a bigger size and well balanced within that story.

Overall, the *Zululand Observer* made extensive use of images on the GBV-related stories posted, with almost every story carrying an image as compared to the *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun*, who made selective use of images. Even though the images were presented in varying sizes within the three publications, they were clear and well visually integrated with the stories, visible, of a good size and quality, self-explanatory and did match the story

presented. According to (Rivers & Matthews, 1988), images are believed to enhance the presentation of a story, thus making the printed page more eye-catching and attractive to the readers. Some images have also been argued to be symbols that have the capacity to develop public interpretations of an event (Perlmutter & Wagner, 2004). Hence the inclusion of images in GBV-related stories is very significant.

Discussion of sources used

Chinball (1977) and Sherizen (1978) also acknowledged that news coverage of issues such as GBV is coloured by the source's journalists use. Although several news sources are at the disposal of the reporters during the news-gathering process, the criminal justice system, which includes the police and court of laws, remains the key source of information for journalists reporting on gender-based violence. As Meyers (1997) explained, journalists see the police as legitimate sources whose views are neutral and, thus, do not need to be balanced with information from those representing opposing opinions.

For the *South Coast Sun*, 51% of the sources used in all the GBV-related stories posted during the period of study were the police, 42% of the sources were NGO or government officials, 6% of the sources were of the victims of GBV, and 1% of the sources used were family members or friends of the victim. For the *Zululand Observer*, 7% of the sources used were purely the police with no other sources included in that particular stories, 18% of the sources were both the family and police quoted in the same stories, 40% of the sources were NGO or government officials quoted in the same stories, 11% of the sources were the victims of GBV, 6% of the sources were courts, and 18% of the sources were from family or friends of the victims quoted in the same stories. For the *Maritzburg Echo*, 16% of the sources used were purely the police with no other sources involved in specific stories, 22% of the sources were both the family and police both included in particular stories, 8% of the sources were both the police and NGO both appearing together in certain stories, 37% of the sources were from the NGO and government officials both included in the same stories, 3% of the sources were the court proceedings, and 14% of the sources were from the family or friends of the victims.

As evidenced by this analysis, there is an over-dependence on the police as the main news source related to gender-based violence, especially with the *South Coast Sun*. For the *Maritzburg Echo* in 46% of the sources used involved the police though other parties were

included as sources within the same story. Chibnall (1977), Meyers (1997), and Sherizen (1978) bemoaned this over-dependence on the police as their “perspective may not be neutral”, as they tend to focus on the offender, and police goals which may not serve the needs of the media, the audience, or crime victims and their families. This reliance and relationship between the police and the media may have an effect on how the stories are presented by the media to the public, despite a growing decline in community confidence and an increase in frustration with police on how they respond to GBV cases.

The diversity of sources used by the *Zululand Observer* is interesting as they relied more on NGO or government officials rather than the police, which is not the case in the *South Coast Sun* which relied heavily on the police as a source. The *Maritzburg Echo*, on the other hand, interestingly relied on multiple sources in their stories and used NGO and government officials more frequently than the *South Coast Sun*. Of note in the *Maritzburg Echo* is that none of the stories posted included the victims as a source.

Word Choice In Gender-Based Violence News Articles

Introduction

Of the three-story categories of GBV identified in the three publications, i.e., awareness-based, uplifting and incident-based stories, the researcher preferred to use incident-based stories as the most suitable category for analysing word choice and language that highlights GBV more clearly. In terms of framing for agenda setting in the reporting of GBV, incident-based stories are better positioned to distinctly foreground descriptive and emotive words that can be used to bring up actions of gender-based violence. Seventy-two GBV-related stories were identified as incident-based stories published during the study period.

Language, in its many forms, which include word choice and phrases, shapes how we think and behave. Framing theory which organises the world for journalists and readers could be used to explain how journalists end up using certain word choices (Gitlin, 1980). According to Entman (1993), word choice can also help frame the news and set the agenda. Some of the word choices preferred by journalists are a part of everyday language and societal interactions, and many reporters probably go along with these words themselves when

reporting on GBV-related matters. These words, therefore, reinforce and shape how the readers understand gender-based violence as presented by the media.

Bullock (2002) pointed out that “news coverage can help determine how society views and responds to societal issues such as domestic violence”. According to Meyers (1997); Manoff and Schudson (1986), the mass media have the power to bring awareness to social issues such as GBV and to provide a picture of events people do not experience directly-especially with the use of images, teach people about society, and help structure how people see the world. Meyers (1997), in an interview with victims’ advocates, highlighted the importance of labelling that is not misleading. In other words, Meyers was alluding to the fact that an incident must be named and classified properly, as this helps society and readers understand better the gravity of the crime perpetrated and its implications.

This discussion is therefore built on the idea that journalists can create different pictures of GBV and confirm or debunk the myths surrounding it by choosing certain words, phrases, or facts and by controlling the placement and repetition of this information. Words are products of expression, and the manner in which an event is expressed in words may evoke emotions and can affect the readers' subjective experiences of pain. Using the right choice of words is important because words affect the way we think, create moods and images in the readers’ minds and trigger emotions, which is essential for effectiveness.

The study is looking at descriptive and emotive words used across all the GBV-related stories in the *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and the *South Coast Sun* from November 2021 to December 2022. Descriptive words are mostly action words that help the reader visualise, bring an image to mind and intensify the situation being spoken about, and provide extra information about the thing being spoken about. A few examples of descriptive words used by the three publications are; “hacked”, “dismembered”, “bludgeoned”, “disembowelled”, “torched”, “butchered” and “slitting”. Emotive words relate to the methodical use of choice of words to provoke emotions, show how someone feels, and evoke specific emotional response in a reader, whether positive or negative. A few examples of emotive words or phrases used by the publications are; “crawl holding her intestines”, “miraculously survived”, “despondent”, “grappling to come to terms”, “bereaved”, “devastated”, “fragile and wounded child”, “heartless killing” and “lying motionless”.

The researcher went through all 72 identified incident-based stories one by one, carefully selecting all words and phrases that are descriptive and emotive and used in the reporting GBV. Using the semantic similarity measure, these identified words and phrases were then grouped according to association in meaning and the connotations they carry. Core concepts of GBV, such as sex, gender, violence, abuse, coercion, consent, power, harm, and human rights (GBV Core Concepts, 2017), were used by the researcher as guidance to formulate the best possible five themes that stood out based on the group of words or phrases classified together according to their similarities, meaning and connotation. After grouping these words and phrases, five themes around GBV emerged, namely: violence; fear; gruesomeness; suffering; and crime and justice.

Discussion of the themes

Introduction

This section will discuss the themes of violence, gruesomeness, suffering, fear and crime and justice that emerged from the data set. The discussion will also focus on how word choice contributes to a particular theme's dominance in the story. The discussion will also connect the themes to news, news values and newsworthiness.

Violence

Anderson & Bushman (2001) refers to violence as extreme forms of aggression such as physical assault and murder. This includes any behaviours that frighten, intimidate, terrorise, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure or wound someone. Murder-femicide and physical abuse are the most dominant forms of violence identified across the three publications under study. As such, violence emerged as the most common frame journalists use to highlight the extent of gender-based violence in the 72 incident-based stories being discussed.

The *Zululand Observer* used words and short phrases such as “senseless killing”, “horrific rape”, “heartless killers”, “slit”, “barbaric”, and “torched” to convey the theme of violence. In an article titled “NURSE KILLER still at large” (16/09/2022), the story is told of a 35-year-old nurse who was allegedly brutally murdered by her boyfriend using a kitchen knife and was found lying on her bed facing upward with her throat cut. Descriptive and emotive phrases used to highlight the theme of violence in this story include; “heartless death”, “her

throat was slit”, “leaving her to breathe her last”, “heartless killers” and “defenceless women”. The perpetrator was called a “heartless killer” to demonstrate that he had no empathy or mercy towards the victim.

The *Maritzburg Echo* used words such as “bludgeoned”, “slitting”, “barbaric”, “abhorrible”, “dismembered”, and “disembowelled” in articles conveying the theme of violence. Other descriptive and emotive words and phrases such as “plotted to kill”, “slitting his throat”, “took the baby and threw her in the forest”, and “poured petrol on the bodies and burned them” also give the readers a mental picture of the degree of violence used by the perpetrators when committing crimes.

The *South Coast Sun* used words and phrases such as “his demeanour changed”, “pushed into corners”, “indecent exposure”, “pour petrol on the body and set it alight”, “bludgeoning”, “lambasted”, “double murder” and “stabbed the victims with a sharp instrument at the back of their heads” in articles such as “Man stands trial for double murder” (24/06/2022), also *article 9* in the appendices section.

The selective use of such words and phrases helps in highlighting how the three publications frame violence in their stories and how they shape public opinion by determining how they should think about violence through the use of such descriptive and emotive words. Also, such words help to create mental pictures in the readers' minds of how the actual crime was committed and paint a picture of the degree of violence and brutality used. The words help place the spotlight on GBV as a larger societal problem.

Fear

Short phrases such as “still traumatised”, “deeply traumatised”, “reeling from shock”, “what if comes back and finishes off the witness?”, and “victims have been shushed” were used in articles posted in the *Zululand Observer* to exemplify the theme of fear. Phrases such as “left traumatised”, “left shaken”, “totally terrified”, and “clambering around” were used in *Maritzburg Echo*. Of the articles posted in the *South Coast Sun*, the phrase “too traumatised” was commonly used in the stories to highlight fear as a theme.

The theme of fear was also directly foregrounded in headlines such as “Woman lives in fear after rape” (04/02/2022) posted in the *South Coast Sun* and “Rape survivor hiding after threat” (16/12/2021), posted in the *Maritzburg Echo*. In the former story, a rape survivor tells of living in the same area as her alleged rapist after he is released on bail. Emotive phrases such as, “still too traumatised to tell anyone...”, “I screamed for help”, and “fearing for my life I did as he said”, were used to convey the fear experienced. In the latter story, a 17-year-old rape survivor went into hiding after unknown gunmen accosted her at home and threatened to kill her. Descriptive and emotive phrases such as “the attacker threatened to kill her”, “totally terrified”, and “even clambering around”, were used to describe the fear in the victim.

A *Zululand Observer* article titled “My brother wanted to stab me with a kitchen knife” (21/10/2022), details the story of a 46-year-old woman afraid of being killed by her brother who attempted to stab her with a knife after she asked him about taking her car without her permission and damaging it. Phrases such as, “sleeping with one eye open has become a norm”, “... he will come back to finish what he started”, “he might come back to “finish me off”, “I thought I was going to die”, and “I have never been so scared in my life”, were used to describe the fear and the emotional state of survivor after the attack.

A significant similarity in the three selected stories on the theme of fear is that the stories focussed on giving a voice to the survivors and allowing them to describe how they felt and their state of being after being attacked by the perpetrators. Giving a voice to the survivors of gender-based violence incidents is very important in raising awareness of the issue and empowering the victims to shift from being called a victim to being a survivor. Mullender & Hague (2005), citing Mullender (1996), argued that, unless survivor accounts are heard at first-hand, we will not have an adequate understanding of:

the complexities of women’s attempts to escape; the use by male partners of all forms of abuse to prevent this; the interaction between the emotional impact of the abuse and the difficulty of negotiating the maze of legal and welfare services: above all, the crucial need for advocacy, self-help and support services to empower women through this process on their own terms (Mullender, 1996).

In light of the information highlighted in this discussion of the theme of fear, the word choice used helps in highlighting the emotions of the victims after the ordeal they went through at the hands of the perpetrator.

Gruesomeness

According to the Collins Dictionary (2023), gruesome means to “inspire repugnance and horror”, often related to an unpleasant death. In other words, gruesome suggests the results of terrifying extreme violence and cruelty. Short phrases such as, “burnt beyond recognition”, “badly decomposed body”, “hacked her on her head several times” and “lifeless bodies” were used in stories posted in the *Zululand Observer*. The *Maritzburg Echo* used short phrases such as “dismembered body”, “horror murders”, “lifeless bodies”, “stacked dead bodies”, “burnt and severely decomposed bodies”, and “stabbed 22 times” to illustrate gruesomeness.

The *South Coast Sun* used short phrases such as “ghastly discovery”, “lifeless bodies”, “bludgeoning to death”, and “poured petrol on the body and set it alight” to highlight the theme of gruesomeness.

The article titled, “Bride teacher’s burnt body discovered” (23/09/2022), posted in the *Zululand Observer* tells of a 38-year-old deceased female teacher’s body found in the bushes a few days before she was to get married. None of her belongings, including her BMW X1 car, were taken by the perpetrators. Descriptive and emotive phrases such as “found burnt beyond recognition”, “her burnt body was found in the nearby area”, and “she was identified by her short blonde hair and burnt cell phone which were found lying next to her”, were used in the story to highlight the gruesome state in which the victim’s body was found and give to a picture of how the victim died unpleasantly.

In an article posted in the *South Coast Sun*, titled “Double murder shocks Isipingo” (21/10/2022), also *article 8* in the appendices section, the deceased bodies of two young women were found abandoned near a warehouse parking lot. Descriptive and or emotive phrases such as, “ghastly discovery”, “lifeless bodies”, “found undressed”, and “the bodies were found on top of each other”, were used to paint a gruesome picture of the state in which the two murdered women’s bodies were discovered.

Some of these descriptions can be regarded as gratuitous and overly grisly. The words used to describe the state of the deceased's bodies do not create a pleasant picture of the victim's last moments. It is significant that in these stories, there is a shift from using neutral phrases such as "dead bodies" to more vividly descriptive and gruesome phrases such as "dismembered body", "severely decomposed bodies", and "lifeless bodies". Such word choices immediately create a mental picture in the reader's mind of the end result of many GBV cases, i.e., a horrifying and unpleasant death.

Suffering

The predominant form of suffering identified in the GBV-related incident-based stories under discussion is an emotional breakdown that often involves some form of sadness, fear and anger. Words and phrases used across the three publications that convey the theme of suffering include: "she can't sleep without having flashbacks", "she screams in the middle of the night", "I can't sleep at night because of nightmares", "grappling to come to terms with her ordeal", "screaming in agony", "fragile and wounded child", "I keep seeing her face wondering if she is safe", "dazed state", "has become aggressive and is quiet most of the time", "she has to live with the effect of this for the rest of her life", "painful and unexplainable", "unfortunate and it is unbearable", and "big hole filled with pain and sorrow".

In an article from the *Maritzburg Echo*, titled "Family speaks about loss" (28/07/2022), about two elderly women strangled to death and an eight year old girl raped before she was also strangled to death, a remaining family member describes her loss. Descriptive and emotive phrases such as, "eyes immediately filled with tears", "she took a long breath", "left with a big hole filled with sorrow and pain", "gone forever" and "I am left alone and don't have siblings" were used to highlight the pain and suffering that the remaining sibling was going through after her family members were murdered.

South Coast Sun posted a story titled, "Child molester sentenced" (18/03/2022), about a 10-year-old girl sexually molested on several occasions by a 59-year-old man. Descriptive phrases such as, "my daughter has become aggressive", "she is quiet most of the time", "he robbed this young girl of her childhood", and "she has to live with the effect for the rest of her life", were used to highlight the emotional turmoil and suffering that the young girl and her family were going through after the abuse.

The words and phrases that convey the theme of suffering highlight the pain, suffering and failure to cope emotionally of the victim or family members after experiencing or being directly affected by the incident of GBV. These words and phrases allow readers to experience the same emotions as the affected.

Crime & Justice

The words 'crime' and 'justice' are intertwined because the expectation is that when a crime is committed, justice must be served. If not, then it is regarded as an injustice. Some of the descriptive and emotive words and phrases that convey the theme of crime and justice used by the three publications include: "crime spree", "rampant explosion of crime", "spate of rapes", "sentence is a slap on the wrist", "miscarriage of justice", "imprisonment is just a slap in the face" and "expressed her dissatisfaction at the sentence".

A story titled "Prestbury woman stabbed" (09/06/2022) posted in the *Maritzburg Echo* tells of a woman, attacked and stabbed at the gate of her house in an attempted robbery. Less than 48 hours after another person was fatally stabbed, a 64-year-old woman was repeatedly raped, and her brother stabbed to death in the same suburb. Descriptive and emotive phrases such as, "the community needs to galvanise themselves to fight the rampant explosion of crime", "the urban decay has created a criminal infestation", "the criminal decay that is consuming the Prestbury community", "stabbed her in the hand and fled the scene", and "the community needs an immediate response from the police" paint a horrible picture of crime in the area with little being done by the police to apprehend the perpetrators.

The *Zululand Observer* posted the story, "Ulundi rapist jailed for 15 years" (06/05/2022), which is about a 15-year prison sentence handed by the court to a convicted rapist for raping a 14-year-old girl. Descriptive and emotive words such as, "the sentence was too lenient", "15 years imprisonment is just a slap in the face", "the man told her she was grown up and wanted to have sex with her" and he "threatened to burn down her house if she reported" were used to highlight the crime perpetrated and the sense of injustice expressed in response to the sentence.

Associated with this theme of crime and justice is the sense of frustration from communities who were not happy with the justice system due to the delays or the failure of police to make an arrest or the sentence handed down to the perpetrators by the court of law.

Connection of the themes to news and news values

The idea of newsworthiness help understand what community or social issues need to be reported. The greater the impact the story has, the more it is considered newsworthy. Stories that have a direct bearing or have real-life consequences on the readers are bound to be newsworthy. News values such as conflict, topicality, relevance, consequence, impact, expectation, human interest, threshold, magnitude, unusualness, follow-on's and surprise (Brighton & Foy, 2007; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001) are considered when deciding on publishing a story, especially as headline news. Jewkes (2004) mentioned simplification, threshold, sex, violence, graphic imagery, risk, conversation and children as news values to consider when examining crime-related stories. Themes such as violence, fear, gruesomeness, suffering, and crime and justice frame events to be considered newsworthy and tap directly into the mentioned news values. During the period of study, a total of twelve GBV-related headline stories were posted across the three publications, thus, four stories from each publication.

Discussion of dominant themes and news values in the headline stories

Zululand Observer

Of the four headline stories posted by the *Zululand Observer*, the first headline story titled, 'SERIAL RAPIST found guilty on seven charges'(18/02/2022), the dominant theme in the story is of crime and justice after the accused was convicted on a total of 24 counts of crime which includes rape, theft, robbery, and housebreaking. News values such as human interest, impact and conflict are intrinsically linked with the story because the crime committed was a social discord that affects the broader community when it comes to the safety and well-being of women in the community. Also rape as a category of GBV resonate with most females as many might have experienced such form of abuse but because of the stigma, cultural beliefs and perceived impunity for perpetrators they choose to remain silent, especially when such cases happen in matrimonies or intimate relationships. In the second headline story, 'NURSE KILLER still at large' posted (16/09/2022), the dominant theme is violence after the victim was stabbed to death and her throat slit allegedly by her boyfriend. News values such as

conflict, human interest and topicality are dominant in the story, as GBV is an enduring social issue and a concerning crime.

In the third headline story titled, 'Who killed Nkosiphile?'(07/10/2022), which is a follow-on story of the one titled 'NURSE KILLER still at large' discussed above, the dominant theme in the story is crime and justice as the police were reported to be actively following up leads to apprehend the suspect. News values such as continuity, relevance, expectation and human interest are in the story as the community, and readers eagerly await the news of the perpetrators' apprehension. In the last headline story titled, 'Gamble fails for SERIAL RAPE suspect' (04/11/2022), the dominant theme is of crime and justice after the suspect who was on the run from the police since 2016 for a spate of rapes was apprehended while gambling at a casino. News values such as human interest, relevance and impact are in the story as his arrest is significant for the community in believing that the justice system still works.

Maritzburg Echo

Of the four headline stories posted in the *Maritzburg Echo*, the first headline story titled, 'FAMILY WANTS JUSTICE after daughter's murder' (07/04/2022), the dominant theme is of crime and justice after the alleged murder suspect was released from police custody because there was insufficient evidence linking him to the murder. News values such as conflict, consequence and impact are in the story as the focus is on the injustice being cited by the victim's family and that the alleged suspect was harassing them. In the second headline story, 'TRIPLE MURDER stuns city' (30/06/2022), the dominant theme is violence after two women and a child were strangled to death with the eight-year-old child allegedly raped before being killed. News values such as threshold, magnitude and human interest are linked to the story because of the number of people killed in one incident and the innocence of the victims, especially the eight-year-old child.

In the third story titled, 'DNA BACKLOG: rapists walk free' (25/11/2022), the dominant theme is of crime and justice after civil organisation Lifeline Pietermaritzburg was bemoaning the delay of DNA results as affecting the progress of court cases. News values such as impact, relevancy and human interest are in the story as the delays affect many people and the delivery of justice in GBV cases such as rape. In the fourth headline titled, 'Dead woman found bound in river' (09/12/2022), the dominant theme is gruesomeness after a

passer-by made a grisly discovery of a half-naked body of a woman dumped in a river with her hands and legs tied with shoelaces, her mouth covered with a plastic and also tied with a shoelace. News values such as human interest, impact and relevance given that such a heinous crime is concerning for the community and was committed during the 16 Days of Activism campaign.

South Coast Sun

Of the four headline stories published in the *South Coast Sun*, the first headline story was titled, 'DON'T LOOK AWAY' (19/12/2021), thus, a week before the start of the 16 Days of Activism campaign. What is interesting in this particular story is that none of the five GBV themes discussed in this study are explicitly dominant because it is awareness-based. However, traces of the theme of violence are subtly identifiable in the story as the writer shares her story to empower other women in abusive situations to get help and speak out. News values such as human interest, relevance, and topicality are evident in the story as it is about the writer's shared experience and personal growth out of a GBV situation, and it is relevant to the readers given its proximity to the 16 Days of Activism campaign.

In the second headline story titled, 'Liesel de Jager murder: a year on' (21/10/2022)-*article 7* in the appendices section, the dominant theme is of crime and justice as a year had lapsed without any arrests being made by the police in connection with the victim's death. News values such as conflict, impact and human interest are linked with the story as it is about an unsolved crime which heavily impacted the community, given that the victim was a well-known church reverend. In the third headline story titled, 'UNSOLVED MURDERS: police remain mum on killings', posted (25/11/2022), two dominant themes of violence and crime and justice are explicitly highlighted in the article as it gave a chronology of serious violent crimes that occurred in Amanzimtoti with no one being arrested for them. News values such as threshold, magnitude, impact, conflict and human interest are linked with the story, as in one of the cases mentioned, seven people were shot dead in one occurrence. Such incidents impact the community negatively, especially with no one being held accountable for manslaughter. In the fourth story titled, 'Closure looms for Operation Bobbi Bear' (09/12/2022), none of the five themes discussed in this study are found in this article. News values such as impact, human interest, relevance and magnitude are naturally in the story as

the closure of the charitable NGO, which looks after abused children and pregnant teenagers, significantly impacts the community and beneficiaries of such a facility negatively.

Conclusion

Having discussed the twelve headline stories posted by the three publications, of the four stories posted in the *Zululand Observer*, the dominant theme identified is crime and justice, and the dominant news values are human interest, conflict and impact. Of the four-headline stories posted in the *Maritzburg Echo*, the dominant theme identified across the stories is crime and justice, and the dominant news values are human interest, impact and relevancy. Of the four-headline stories posted in the *South Coast Sun*, the dominant theme identified is crime and justice, and the most prevalent news values are human interest, impact and magnitude. Jewkes (2004) found that all crime news content will feature negativity as crime is inherently negative, making it newsworthy. Galtung and Ruge (1965) identified reference to something negative as a common factor in the news. These sentiments expressed by Jewkes (2004) and Galtung and Ruge (1965) contributed to the twelve headline stories being classified as such.

Negativity is a common factor in the news. Newsworthiness in the twelve headline stories discussed was generally dictated by no arrests being made by the police, the degree of brutality used, the number of people killed in a single incident and serial rapists. Pritchard and Hughes (1997); Paulson (2003) concurred that the media coverage of murder cases increases when the murder involves children; involves female and multiple victims; involves victims of higher social status (Peelo et al., 2004); and involves the use of firearms (Gruenwald et al., 2009). All the above-mentioned elements of newsworthiness are found across the twelve headline stories discussed. According to Chermak (1995), the above-mentioned considerations in the twelve headline stories explain the newsworthiness of such murders or homicide by way of statistical deviance, that is, how the crime differs from the usual statistical norm.

Comparison Of Articles Published During The 16 Days Of Activism Campaigns Of

2021 And 2022

Introduction

The 16 Days of Activism campaign against gender-based violence, commemorated annually from the 25th of November to the 10th of December, is an important time period set aside to raise awareness and campaign against the exponentially rising numbers of GBV worldwide. Because of the significance of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign period, it is useful to examine the period November to December 2021 and November to December 2022 and compare the number of GBV-related stories posted by each publication and how they are framed. Secondly, the stories published during these period are examined in terms of their predominant themes: *violence, fear, gruesomeness, suffering, and crime and justice*. This would show whether the word choice and framing of the stories supported the agenda of the 16 Days of Activism. Two time periods are compared to see whether any changes occurred in the frequency and framing of the GBV-related news stories. Overall, 42% of all the GBV-related stories covered in this study were posted during the 16 Days of Activism campaign period.

Zululand Observer

For the *Zululand Observer*, 29 GBV-related stories were posted during the two 16 Days of Activism campaign periods of 2021 and 2022. Fifteen GBV-related stories were posted from November to December 2021; thus, eight were awareness-based, five were incident-based, and two uplifting story. For the same period in 2022, fourteen GBV-related stories were posted. Thus, six awareness-based, five incident-based and three uplifting stories. This shows that 20% of all the GBV-related stories posted during the entire period of study were recorded in the *Zululand Observer* during the campaign period.

Of the four GBV-related headline stories posted in the *Zululand Observer* discussed earlier in this chapter, none were posted during the campaign period. Awareness-based stories were dominant during this period and contained mostly images related to marches and gatherings commemorating the 16 Days of Activism campaign. Of the incident-based stories identified

in the *Zululand Observer* during the campaign, the theme of violence was dominant, and the stories included images of the victims. Descriptive and emotive phrases such as “lifeless bodies”, “brutally attacked”, “gang -raped”, “she sits silently by her mother's grave”, “now having serious mental and emotional problems”, and “our hearts are bleeding for her”, were used in some of the incident-based stories posted during the campaign period.

It is encouraging to note that during both periods, the emphasis in the *Zululand Observer* was firmly placed on raising awareness, with eight awareness-based stories being posted in November to December 2021 and six in November to December 2022. This was followed by five incident-based stories in November to December 2021 and five in November to December 2022 respectively.

Maritzburg Echo

For the *Maritzburg Echo*, nineteen GBV-related stories were posted during the two 16 Days of Activism campaign periods of 2021 and 2022. Nine GBV-related stories were posted from November to December 2021; thus, three were awareness-based, five were incident-based and one uplifting story. For the same period in 2022, ten GBV-related stories were posted. Thus, five awareness-based, four incident-based, and one uplifting story. This shows that 13% of all the GBV-related stories posted during the entire period of study were recorded in the *Maritzburg Echo* during the campaign period.

Of the four GBV-related headline stories posted in the *Maritzburg Echo* discussed earlier in this chapter, two of these headline stories were posted during the campaign period: at the start of the campaign, ‘DNA BACKLOG: rapists walk free’ (25/11/2022) and ‘Dead woman found bound in river’ (09/12/2022), ending the campaign period on a negative note. Incident-based stories were dominant in the *Maritzburg Echo*, followed by awareness-based stories during this period. Awareness-based related images were dominant in the stories posted during the campaign period. Of the incident-based stories identified during the campaign period, the theme of violence was dominant, and no images were included in these stories. Descriptive and emotive phrases such as ‘extremely disturbing’, ‘terrible tragedy’, ‘brutally murdered’, ‘her body was dumped into the river’ and ‘miscarriage of justice’ were used in some incident-based stories identified during the campaign period.

During the campaign period in 2021, incident-based were dominant followed by awareness-based, which changed in 2022 where awareness-based stories increased from three to five stories and incident-based stories dropping from five to four stories.

South Coast Sun

For the *South Coast Sun*, thirteen GBV-related stories were posted during the two 16 Days of Activism Campaign periods of 2021 and 2022. Eight GBV-related stories were posted from November to December 2021. Thus, seven were awareness-based and one was incident-based. For the same period in 2022, five GBV-related stories were posted; thus, two awareness-based, one incident-based, and two uplifting stories. This shows that 9% of all the GBV-related stories posted during the period of study were recorded in the *South Coast Sun* during the campaign period.

Of the four GBV-related headline stories posted in the *South Coast Sun*, as discussed earlier in this chapter, two of the headline stories were posted during the campaign period: at the beginning of the campaign ‘UNSOLVED MURDERS: police remain mum on killings’ (25/11/2022), thus, starting the campaign on a negative note by highlighting the theme of crime and justice. The second headline story was posted towards the end of the campaign, ‘Closure looms for Operation Bobbi Bear’ (09/12/2022), ending the campaign negatively due to the shelter for GBV-abused children and pregnant teenagers facing possible closure because of financial constraints. Awareness-based related images were dominant throughout the stories published in the *South Coast Sun* during the campaign period. The dominant theme of the incident-based story posted during this period was violence, and the article included an image of the victims. Descriptive and emotive phrases such as ‘public assassinations’ ‘hits have been taken on them’, ‘shot dead’, ‘found dead’, ‘strangulation marks’, and ‘carefully planned and orchestrated operations’ were used in the single incident-based story posted during the campaign period.

During the two campaign periods, a significant drop in awareness-based stories was noticed in the *South Coast Sun* from seven in 2021 to two in 2022. However, awareness-based stories remained dominant during the two-time periods. The dominance of awareness-based stories posted in the *South Coast Sun* corresponds with the core agenda of the 16 Days of Activism, that is, to raise awareness of GBV.

Discussion

For the period of November to December 2021, the *Zululand Observer* posted eight awareness-based stories, the *South Coast Sun* posted seven, and the *Maritzburg Echo* posted three. This means the *Zululand Observer* and the *South Coast Sun* followed the 16 Days of Activism Campaign's agenda to raise awareness of GBV. For November to December 2022, a significant improvement in prioritising GBV was noted in the *Maritzburg Echo*, which posted five awareness-based stories compared to three in the previous period. For the *Zululand Observer*, six awareness-based stories were posted from November to December 2022, which was a decline compared to the same period from November to December 2021.

The most dominant theme noted across the three publications during the two 16 Days of Activism Campaigns is violence, which is the opposite of what the period advocates for. This is as such even though awareness-based stories were dominant during these periods. News values such as sex, violence, graphic imagery, children and conversation, as identified by Jewkes (2004), are present in the headline stories posted in the *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun* during the campaign. On sex and children as news values, Jewkes (2004) referred to any crimes with a sexual dimension as newsworthy, especially with women and children as victims. On conversation, Jewkes (2004) further pointed out that some GBV cases are made newsworthy by calls for harsher punishment that can act as a deterrence to would be offenders, such as the headline story posted in the *South Coast Sun* (25/11/2022).

Lastly, out of the thirteen-month period covered by this study, a combined four-week period or one month encompasses the two 16 Days of Activism campaign periods in which 42% of all the GBV-related stories discussed in this study were posted. The least number of uplifting stories across the three publications were posted during the campaign period, with the *Zululand Observer* and *South Coast Sun* firmly placing their agenda on raising awareness. In contrast, the *Maritzburg Echo* aimed to highlight crime by posting more incident-based stories during the campaign period. All the four headline stories posted during the campaign period were of a negative nature.

Conclusion

This chapter analysed the framing of GBV-related stories, focussing on story category, frequency, priority, sources, and use of images, and identified the prevalent themes in the incident-based GBV-related stories. The chapter also looked at newsworthiness focussing on the twelve GBV-related headline stories posted across the three publications. From the framing discussion, it became apparent that most of the GBV-related stories across the three publications were posted between pages one and four, and most of these stories were posted during the middle and last week of the month as indicated in *table 3* on page 83. The *Zululand Observer* included more images in their stories than the *South Coast Sun* and the *Maritzburg Echo*.

In terms of story source, the *South Coast Sun* and the *Maritzburg Echo* relied heavily on the police, whereas the *Zululand Observer* relied on NGOs such as Lifeline as their main source of GBV-related stories. The five emergent themes of violence, fear, gruesomeness, suffering and crime and justice were identified through the choice of descriptive and emotive words in the stories and discussed in detail earlier in this chapter. The theme of violence was dominant during the 16 Days of Activism period. Some dominant news values identified in the twelve headline stories discussed included conflict, human interest, impact, threshold, violence, sex, relevance and consequence. Finally, awareness-based stories were dominant in the *Zululand Observer* and *South Coast Sun*, with incident-based stories dominating in the *Maritzburg Echo* during the 16 Days of Activism campaign periods of November to December 2021 and 2022.

Chapter Six: Research Findings & Conclusions

Introduction

This study intended to explore how framing and word choice contributed to agenda-setting in the reporting of gender-based violence in KwaZulu-Natal community newspapers. While the previous chapter presented a discussion and analysis of the data generated through the content and thematic analyses, this chapter will present the research findings in response to the research question and sub-questions. To summarise, the sub-questions for this study were to determine how articles dealing with gender-based violence are framed, to determine what descriptive and emotive words were used in the reporting of gender-based violence, to determine if any changes occur in the framing of articles on gender-based violence during the 16 Days of Activism campaign period of 2021 and 2022, and in conclusion, to determine how word choice and framing prioritised the issue of gender-based violence in terms of media agenda-setting.

Findings

How are GVB-related articles framed?

Having elaborated on the significance of the frames used by the three publications in the previous chapter, a number of similarities and differences were noted: all three publications, *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo*, and *South Coast Sun*, carried the same number of headline stories over the study period. The *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun* had four follow-on stories, whereas the *Zululand Observer* carried five follow-on stories over the duration of the study period. The striking similarities noted in terms of the number of headline and follow-on stories published across the three publications studied, and the space allocation range of between 28-34% on all GBV-related articles published across the three publications during the period of study raises eyebrows, and is eye-catching. This is so given that all the three publications are owned by one company, Caxton Media, and this raises questions on whether the company centralises its editorial control or decisions across all its publications, therefore centrally deciding on the number of headline and follow-on stories, and the amount of space to be allocated on GBV-related stories across its publications over a given period of time. For all the publications under consideration, most of the GBV-related stories were featured on pages two and three, respectively.

Including images in the GBV-related stories serves as a strong frame that represents realistically a complex social problem, enhances credibility, proves that the event has happened and tells a story on their own. Jewkes (2015) reiterated that graphic imagery can contribute to the story's authenticity and crime. In this regard, the *Zululand Observer* included more images in their stories, with 52 images, compared to the *South Coast Sun* with seventeen and *Maritzburg Echo* with 21 images, respectively. In instances where the GBV-related stories carried no images, it could have been done as such to protect the victim's identity because the victim was a minor or the perpetrator has not been formally charged in a court of law.

According to Wittman (1995: 44), framing or frames undoubtedly highlight the issue of restricted attention to situations in which the audience is artificially sequestered and restricted to hearing only one way of thinking about a political or social issue. This is mainly highlighted by the fact that during the period under study, none of the three newspapers, the *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo*, and *South Coast Sun*, published a GBV story that occurred outside the district/communities they serve, or designated areas of distribution or a GBV that grabbed headlines nationally or provincially. However, in one instance, the *Zululand Observer* posted a GBV-related story on the 28th of October 2022 titled, 'Woman survives horrific 'taxi driver' GBV ordeal', that happened in KwaDukuza, one of the nine identified GBV hotspots, but the survivor is a resident of Zululand; hence the publication took an interest in that story. Tuchman (1978); Manoff & Schudson (1986); and Meyers (1997) concur that 'the mass media have the power to bring awareness to social issues and to provide a picture of events people do not experience directly, teach people about society and help structure how people see the world'.

For the period under study, the three community newspapers focussed on GBV cases that happened within their areas of distribution which to some extent is commendable but also a disadvantage as this restricts their audiences from understanding GBV as a broader societal problem. These publications focus strictly on the areas they serve, which promotes social cohesion and identity. It creates a personal and intimate connection with their audiences by solely reflecting on the communities they serve and their stories, i.e., they are embracing the leadership role in such communities and committing to being a local watchdog. This, to a

greater extent, holds the community together, enables it to talk to itself, therefore helping build and maintain the connections of trust necessary to link members of the community

What descriptive and emotive words are used in GBV-related articles?

Word choice can be described as the skilful use of language to create meaning. Descriptive words paint a vivid picture in the reader's mind, while emotive words elicit an emotional response from the reader. This study did not include in the analysis obvious verbs or nouns that would be expected in a GBV-related story, such as rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, murder, killed, died, assaulted, stabbed, abused and non-consensual sex. The emphasis was, therefore, on identifying words or phrases that evoked an imaginative or emotional response from the reader. These words were then grouped according to similarities in terms of connotation and association. By looking at these groupings, it was then possible to identify the dominant themes such as violence, fear, gruesomeness, suffering, and crime and justice discussed in the previous chapter.

Across the three publications, descriptive words that conveyed the theme of violence included: ‘bludgeoning’, ‘disembowelled’, ‘torched’, ‘slitting’, ‘hacked’, ‘butchered’, and ‘torched’. Emotive words such as ‘barbaric’, ‘senseless killing’, ‘heartless killers’ and ‘callous rapist’ were used. These words framed the acts of gender-based violence as intentional and deliberately violent. These words are also dehumanising, both for the victim and the perpetrator, as they bring to mind the slaughter of animals. The words used to convey the theme of violence are also very physical and are likely to have a chilling effect on the reader. The effect is to frame gender-based violence as impulsive and primal. According to Amisi, Bridger & Vanyoro (2022), South Africans need to frame the problem as an endemic social condition that they can stop through deliberate action because, framing gender-based violence as a ‘crisis’ will not prevent it, but is merely bandaging a festering societal wound.

The theme of fear was conveyed across the three publications through the use of emotive short phrases or words such as ‘left traumatised’, ‘left shaken’, ‘totally terrified’, ‘reeling from shock’, and ‘fraught with fear’. Descriptive phrases such as ‘chambering around’, ‘having nightmares’ and ‘is afraid that he will come to finish what he started’ were used to describe how the victims were feeling after experiencing GBV or after learning that the accused perpetrators has been released from custody on bail. These phrases emphasised the

powerlessness of the victims. They also persuade the reader to identify with the victim through the emotional response that these phrases elicit.

The theme of gruesomeness is conveyed through descriptive words or short phrases such as “burnt beyond recognition”, “dismembered”, “stacked dead bodies”, “ghastly discovery”, “lying motionless”, “lifeless bodies”, “soaked with blood”, and “badly decomposed body”, and emotive short phrases such as “horror murders”, “gut-wrenching”. These words are powerful in creating vivid mental images of the violence being described. While it could be argued that using such words and descriptions may amount to secondary violence and sensationalism, the desired effect is to frame and highlight gender-based violence as a horrific and barbaric act. Readers experience a visceral response to the graphic horror of gender-based violence through this theme.

Similar to the theme of fear, suffering encourages the reader to identify with the victims of gender-based violence. Across the three publications, descriptive phrases used to portray fear include “grappling to come to terms”, “victim suffering intense trauma”, “screaming in agony”, “still traumatised”, “battles to sleep”, “fragile and wounded”, and emotive phrases such as “unfortunate and it's unbearable” and “painful and unexplainable”. The most prevalent form of suffering highlighted by these phrases is psychological, which is suffering emanating from the mind after experiencing or witnessing a disturbing GBV event.

The final theme of crime and justice was conveyed through descriptive phrases such as “fugitive”, “assailant”. “spate of rapes”, “crime spree”; and emotive phrases highlighting the fear of crime, such as, “miscarriage of justice”, “rampant explosion of crime”, and “judgement was a slap on the wrist”. Both emotive and descriptive words on the theme of crime and justice are centred around the expectation for justice, and the sense of injustice experienced when the justice system fails. These phrases included framed gender-based violence as part of a broader landscape of crime, exacerbated by a failing justice system.

In conclusion, choosing the right word choice or phrases to use in a sentence or text can be challenging when it comes to words that may be viewed as similar in meaning. One such example are the words/phrases identified in this study as descriptive and or emotive in the reporting of GBV. While descriptive words fall in the category of words that creates imagery in the

reader's mind, while emotive words provokes an emotional response from the reader, both categories of words are fundamentally intertwined, therefore may be used interchangeably though they carry distinct meanings. Overall, the three publications mainly applied the use of descriptive words than emotive words in the reporting of GBV but the distinction between the two is very thin as some words may fit in both categories. The themes of violence and gruesomeness emphasise the physicality and brutality of the experience of gender-based violence. In contrast, the themes of fear and suffering enable the reader to connect with the victims emotionally. The theme of crime and justice frames gender-based violence as part of a broader experience of crime. These themes do not work in isolation, and many articles used multiple themes to frame the story. However, this study has been interested in identifying the dominant theme in the articles when examining the word choices.

What changes occurred from 2021 to 2022 in the framing and word choice used in the 16 Days of Activism?

From November to December 2021, 32 GBV-related stories were posted, and from November to December 2022, 29 GBV-related stories were published across the three publications during the 16 Days of Activism campaign periods. This means 42% of all the GBV-related stories identified during the period of study-November 2021 to December 2022 were posted during these periods as compared to the rest of the period under study. There was no significant difference between the two campaign periods of 2021 and 2022.

In terms of story category, awareness-based stories were dominant during both the 16 Days of Activism periods. In 2021, there were eighteen awareness-based stories posted across the three publications and in 2022, the number of stories dropped to thirteen. The biggest drop was noted in the *South Coast Sun*, which dropped from seven stories in 2021 to two stories in 2022. The *Zululand Observer* also recorded a drop from eight stories in 2021 to six in 2022. The *Maritzburg Echo* recorded an increase from three awareness-based stories in 2021 to five in 2022. Despite the drop noted, the reporting trajectory during the 16 Days of Activism was better than the rest of the study period, as 42% of all GBV-related stories discussed in this study were posted during the campaign period.

On the use of images during the 16 Days of Activism campaign period, the *South Coast Sun* mainly used images related to the commemoration of the campaign period, including political

figures, delegates attending workshops, the police raising awareness, and community members marching against GBV. In the instance of the headline story posted on the 25th of November 2022, the *South Coast Sun* used the images of the victims. The *Zululand Observer* also used images to raise awareness during the campaign period. Most images were of marches against GBV and delegates attending GBV-related workshops. In one instance, in a follow-on story posted on the 2nd of December 2022, the *Zululand Observer* included an insert from the previous related story containing the victim's image. The *Maritzburg Echo* used a few images during the campaign period, including those of marches against GBV and experts commenting on a GBV-related matter. Overall, the three publications mostly used images firmly related to the 16 Days of Activism campaign, that is, raising awareness.

Of the five GBV-related themes such as violence, gruesomeness, fear, suffering, and crime and justice discussed in chapter five, the theme of violence was dominant, followed by crime and justice in the few incident-based stories published during the 16 Days of Activism campaign period in the *Maritzburg Echo* in 2021 and 2022. In the *Zululand Observer*, the theme of violence was dominant in 2021, and the themes of violence and crime and justice were dominant in 2022. In the *South Coast Sun*, the theme of crime and justice was dominant during the campaign period, necessitated by the lack of arrests in numerous murders that have been recorded. Overall, the theme of violence was dominant across the three publications discussed during the two campaign periods of 2021 and 2022. Themes such as fear, suffering, and gruesomeness were not registered across the three publications during the campaign periods.

Looking at story priority during the campaign period with focus placed on the first four pages of each publication, the following deductions were made: of the overall 34 GBV-related stories posted between pages 1 and 4 in the *Zululand Observer*, four of these stories were recorded during the 16 Days of Activism campaign with the majority of the stories concentrated between pages 25 and 32 during the same period. The *Maritzburg Echo* posted 29 stories between pages 1 and 4, of which six stories were recorded during the campaign period, including two headline stories, as discussed in the previous chapter. The *South Coast Sun* posted 28 stories between pages 1 and 4, of which eight were recorded during the campaign period, two of which were headline stories, as noted in the previous chapter. This discussion on story priority shows that out of the 91 stories posted between pages 1 and 4

across the three publications, eighteen were recorded during the 16 Days of Activism campaign. This is an impressive statistic for a period of four weeks as compared to the rest of the study period, in which the publications averaged about seven stories per month published between pages 1 and 4 across the three publications.

Looking at the sources used during the campaign period, the *Maritzburg Echo* mostly relied on expert comments from organisations such as FAMSA, Lifeline and academics in most of their stories posted during the campaign period. The *South Coast Sun* relied on political figures such as the Premier, MEC, councillors and NGOs such as Bobbi Bear and ATU as sources commenting on GBV during the campaign period. The *Zululand Observer* relied heavily on NGO Lifeline Zululand and other expert commentators to provide information on GBV during the campaign period. From this observation, the three publications overall relied on NGOs involved with victims of GBV and experts as sources during the 16 Days of Activism Campaign period. This is a shift from the rest of the study period, where the police were mainly used as sources. Using experts and NGOs as sources rather than the police allows a more open, accurate and prudent discussion of the GBV phenomenon. According to Kilgo (2021):

relying on the police as sources gives them an opportunity to shape the initial version of the events-and it gets their version of the story into the public consciousness before victims, families and their supporters do. But often they do so in a way that is incomplete, misleading or presented for strategic reasons.

Official statements may, intentionally or not, withhold or omit information. Overall, no major changes were recorded in terms of framing and word choice, as all the three publications were consistent on the agenda of raising awareness during the 16 Days of Activism campaign periods of 2021 and 2022.

Conclusions

How framing contributes to placing GBV on the news agenda

This study sought to understand how word choice and framing contribute to agenda-setting in reporting gender-based violence in KZN community newspapers. Looking at framing as the main anchoring theory used in this study, the following deductions were made. Overall, the three publications, *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun*, have not necessarily regarded GBV as a priority grounding this supposition on the premise that each of

the three publications only posted four GBV-related headline stories during the entire thirteen-month period of study. Secondly, with GBV regarded as a secondary pandemic in South Africa, only 145 GBV-related stories were posted across the three publications during the entire period of study, which is a challenge to the idea of issue salience, in which McCombs and Shaw (1972) pointed out that the more an issue is published, the more the public regard it as important. The idea of issue salience was not achieved by the three publications through the number of GBV headline stories recorded and the overall number of stories posted during the entire period of study.

On using sources as a frame, the *South Coast Sun* and the *Maritzburg Echo* relied heavily on the police as a source. In contrast, the *Zululand Observer* relied on Lifeline Zululand, an NGO that deals with GBV-related issues, as their main source. Kilgo (2021) challenged the idea of over-relying on the police as a news source because such official statements may, intentionally or not, withhold or omit information. 51% of the sources used by the *South Coast Sun* were directly the police. 7% of the sources used by the *Zululand Observer* were the police, and 18% of their sources were both the police and the victims' family. 16% of the sources used in the *Maritzburg Echo* were directly the police, 22% were both the police and the family of the victims, and 8% was a combination of both the police and NGOs. The *Zululand Observer* used the police in a few instances.

In contrast, the *South Coast Sun* and the *Maritzburg Echo* quoted the police as sources in most instances even though they might have included other sources in the same story. In the *Zululand Observer*, 11% of their sources were the victims, the *Maritzburg Echo* used none and 2% of the sources used in the *South Coast Sun* were the victims. Other sources such as experts, family and community members were not equitably represented across the three publications. According to Ronning et al. (2002), equally representing and giving a voice to all actors involved in a given story is important because it enables getting accurate information, gives better insights and different angles and, altogether a better story. In this regard, the study concludes that all sources were not impartially and sufficiently used across the three publications, especially giving the survivors of GBV a voice. Of the three publications, the *Zululand Observer* used Lifeline more as a key source as compared to the *South Coast Sun* and *Maritzburg Echo*, however during the 16 Days of Activism campaign

period, all the three publications used diverse sources, with the police being the least of those sources.

In terms of story category, 145 GBV-related stories were recorded across the publications. The stories were grouped into three categories: incident-based, awareness-based and uplifting. A group total of 74 incident-based stories, 53 awareness-based and eighteen uplifting stories were registered across the three publications. A total of 73 of these stories were posted by the *Zululand Observer*: 40 incident-based, 23 awareness-based and ten uplifting stories. The *Maritzburg Echo* posted 39 stories: 22 incident-based, thirteen awareness-based and four uplifting stories. The *South Coast Sun* posted 33 stories: twelve incident-based, seventeen awareness-based, and four uplifting stories. Of the 74 incident-based stories recorded across the publications, the highlighted GBV-related crimes were 33 murder/femicide stories, twelve rape, eight rape-murder and six conviction stories. On the story category, this study observed that the *Zululand Observer* posted more stories in each category than the *Maritzburg Echo* and the *South Coast Sun*. Murder/femicide is the most dominant form of GBV perpetrated and recorded across the three publications. More uplifting stories need to be posted by these three publications, especially survivor stories, as they are important to breaking the silence and letting other silent victims know that it is possible to overcome the trauma of GBV.

According to Sontag (2003), images are an invitation to pay attention to what is being presented. In terms of framing, looking at the use of images across the three publications, the *Zululand Observer* made extensive use of images in its GBV-related stories compared to the *Maritzburg Echo* and the *South Coast Sun*, who made selective use of images in their GBV-related stories. However, the images used by the three publications were professionally done and well executed; none used graphic images of badly wounded or dead victims of GBV. In most instances where the victims' images were used, the three publications selectively used the victims' unscathed images during their happier times to show how beautiful and young these victims were before they were brutally murdered. According to Rivers & Matthews (1988), this enhances the presentation of the stories because it appeals emotionally to the readers on how such beautiful and young lives are being lost through acts of GBV. This study concludes that the use of images across the three publications was well intended and answers the question of the importance of placing an image in a story.

How word choice contributes to placing GBV on the news agenda

Descriptive and emotive words that this study sought are part of media representations, including how cultural identities are represented within the text. According to Holliday (2010), this cultural identity can include various aspects such as the community, family, language, class and religion, which therefore impacts the selection of word choice on how GBV is reported by the three publications discussed. KZN is regarded as a highly patriarchal society, and GBV is a common occurrence; hence nine areas were listed as GBV hotspots during the period of study. These patriarchal tendencies are evident in how GBV is presented in the community newspapers discussed as, firstly, GBV was framed and reported as individual incidences, not a broader societal problem. None of the three publications reported on GBV incidences that happened outside their areas of circulation, even on incidences that grabbed national and international headlines, such as the two KZN grade twelve teenage girls raped, murdered and dismembered to death in Creighton, southern KZN (IOL, 2022), and Namhla Mtwa, Bokgabo Poo, Hillary Gardee (The Citizen, 2022), who were brutally murdered in different parts of South Africa also during the study period. Reporting on such cases that shook the nation could have helped the community newspapers frame GBV as a broader societal issue, thus using thematic framing rather than an episodic frame that focuses on GBV as a single or isolated incidence as the case in their reports.

In the cases that were reported by the three publications, the use of descriptive words such as “bludgeoned”, “torched”, “dismembered”, “disembowelled”, “hacked”, “slit” or “butchered” was very limited even though the context of the story permits the use of such words as compared to the widespread use of regularly used words such as “stabbed”, “killed”, “burnt to death”, “died” or “found dead”, which were made use of in almost every GBV related story recorded by the three publications. The lack of diversity in descriptive and emotive (equivalency framing) word choice across the three publications is of concern.

Varying word choices can be imperative, especially when writing about a prevailing and persistent social issue such as gender-based violence, an everyday occurrence that most communities have normalised. For example, in the *Zululand Observer’s* “Ulundi woman fatally assaulted with axe” (19/08/22), the neighbour said, “we would intervene but never thought it will end like this”. This implied the abuse was a regular occurrence. Still, because

most communities regard it as “domestic” or private, it was not reported to the police until the woman was brutally assaulted to death.

The media is saturated by the use of normal words in GBV stories, people consume these disinterested words daily, and their minds become saturated by such words, which may become void of meaning and a part of the everyday language used even by young children without any fear or weight which they are supposed to carry. Regular words such as “attacked”, “common assault”, “domestic incident”, “domestic disturbance”, “kill”, “killed”, “deceased”, “died”, “dead”, “sexually assaulted”, “harassed” or “abused”, and or “non-consensual sex”, no longer convey the negativity and depth they are supposed to carry in the fight against GBV. With the high prevalence of GBV, a woman is killed every four hours (Al Jazeera, 2021), and about 115 women are raped every day in South Africa (Gouws, 2022), with even more cases going unreported in the country and communities. Using regular words in such GBV situations no longer generates a lot of interest from the reader or teaches them anything new about GBV because these words have become too common.

Therefore, the choice of words is very important, like how the three publications used descriptive and emotive words in some instances to highlight GBV. The effect of equivalency framing, using different descriptive and emotive words such as “bludgeoned”, “torched”, “dismembered”, “disembowelled”, “slit”, “hacked”, “butchered” instead of known words such as “stabbed”, “killed”, “burnt”, “attacked” or “wounded” often generates inquisitiveness from the readers. However, this does not necessarily mean that in order to properly cover GBV, newspapers need to be as dramatic and sensationalist as possible in their language choice. What this study is urging for is that, varied word choice or branching away from the incessant use of regular words is very important and interesting in reporting GBV with a different dimension. Though the reader might not understand such word choices, applying equivalency framing can captivate the reader to wanting to know more about the meaning of such word choices. It could encourage the reader to research such words further, increasing their learning and understanding of the GBV situation in which such words were used.

According to McCombs (1972), in selecting and presenting news, editors and journalists play a vital role in shaping reality. Through placement, story frequency, and use of particular word choice, readers learn about the importance of an issue such as GBV and how much

importance to attach to that issue, for example, by just looking at story's position in the newspaper. Equivalency framing, using descriptive and emotive words that are not regular, undoubtedly helps increase newsworthiness as it touches on news values such as surprise, impact, rarity, relevance, human interest and the idea that news must be new. Also, using words with a negative tone increases news value. The use of equivalency framing (Druckman, 2001c) in place of widely used regular words in the community newspapers discussed is encouraging, though not sufficiently applied because regular words such as “non-consensual sex”, “touching a woman inappropriately”, “calling her names”, and “killed in a domestic dispute”, tends to normalise GBV and femicide and do not mirror the reality of GBV as a criminal offence punishable by law.

The use of regular words in GBV stories, by extension, questions if the media, especially community newspapers, are doing enough to raise awareness on GBV by setting the agenda through how such matters are framed using word choice, story frequency, story priority and the overall presentation of such stories. Because representations are selective, there is a possibility of normalising specific worldviews, such as ‘DV is a private matter’ through regular words which become systematic. For example, if femicide cases are framed as ‘killed’ or ‘died’, and rape is framed as ‘non-consensual sex’, the construction of reality in such crimes will not be equitably achieved. Equivalency framing, therefore, plays a pivotal role in foregrounding GBV, which usually is no longer being achieved through the use of regular words. This study concludes that the framing of GBV using descriptive and emotive words, using equivalency framing, in some of the stories discussed was well-timed, well-intended and important though not frequently done enough. This might have positively moved GBV up the news agenda because of their demonstrative nature compared to using regular words. Descriptive words such as “bludgeoning”, “slit”, “hacked”, and “butchered”, are powerful in terms of shaping our understanding of GBV and captivating the reader into wanting to know more, though such words may be viewed as not necessarily adding to our awareness of the humanity of the victim, they play a pivotal role in creating a vivid imagery of how the crime was perpetrated. This however cannot be achieved through the use of regular words such as “attacked”, “stabbed”, “killed”, “abused” and or “assaulted.”

With more than 50 000 cases of GBV and femicide reported annually (Maine, 2023) and 3 198 femicide cases recorded in 2022 (Africa Check, 2023), a total of 145 GBV-related

stories posted across the three publications over the reporting period are inadequate and amounts to underrepresentation as the gap between case and story ratio does not paint a realistic picture of GBV prevalence in the country and the nine GBV hotspots identified in KZN. The insufficient coverage, especially in the *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun*, may potentially downplay GBV as a topic worthy of attention, discussion, and individual or collective action. Furthermore, the use of regular words instead of more demonstrative descriptive and emotive words is so prevalent across the three publications, which to some extent contributes to a failure by these three publications to discuss and explicitly label GBV correctly and effectively. This may result in the misunderstanding of the GBV phenomenon. Such framing overlooks the real problem. By incorrectly labelling the case, the newspapers will be concealing who is at fault while representing the crime as detached from the broader societal issue.

From the discussion above and in the previous chapters, the frames and discourses used by the three publications are skewed towards camouflaging the complexity and depth of GBV in the communities they serve, in favour of using simpler narratives that are neutral. Negative framing, which is believed to affect people's responses to information, is important in dissuading people from committing crimes and producing favourable responses (Cacciatore et al., 2016), but is minimally used across the three publications. It is evident that during the period of study, the three community newspapers, *Zululand Observer*, *Maritzburg Echo* and *South Coast Sun*, did not firmly place GBV higher on their agenda based on the premise that only twelve GBV related headlines were posted across the three publications over a period of thirteen months. Also, the intermittent publication of GBV-related stories across the three publications is concerning based on the fact that the *Zululand Observer* did not post a GBV-related story for 23 out of 64 weeks of print, the *Maritzburg Echo* did not post a GBV-related story for 34 out of 58 weeks of print and the *South Coast Sun* did not post a GBV-related story for 35 out of 58 weeks of print.

According to Sutherland et al. (2019), media reporting is an important indicator of community attitudes and beliefs about violence against women, and thus a critical site through which to measure progress towards shifting social norms that reinforce or exacerbate it. Having said this, one of the key revelations from this study was the discovery of that the issue of GBV as a topic of national interest and concern was not given enough coverage in the three community newspapers, in a longer presentation that provide enough exposure for a

deeper insight into the topic, as the use of comments, views or interviews particularly from the survivors or family members of the victims who could have passed on, was very rare and limited. Another worrying trend to emerge from this study was that, across the three publications discussed, none of them initiated the topic of GBV or violence against women, but rather they reported on it by a way of short news once they get information from their sources, mostly Lifeline and the police. Overall, the space allocated to GBV related stories was very nominal except for some instances during the 16 Days of Activism campaign where especially in the Zululand Observer, a whole page or two were dedicated to GBV related matters.

Suggestions to improve the reporting of GBV-related stories

To improve such projections, the study suggests how community newspapers might use framing and word choice to place GBV on the agenda. Firstly, the publications could make use of non-governmental organisations such as Lifeline Crisis Centre, FAMSA, Thuthuzela Care Centres, Saferspaces, and many others, who are always on the ground and operate in the nine identified GBV hotspots and dealing directly with GBV cases daily to gather relevant and recent data or stories on GBV. These NGOs have trained personnel to give the publications accurate, educative, enlightening and correct information on GBV. However, the use of and reliance on external organisations for reliable information does not exonerate these publications from initiating or taking the lead in writing stories on GBV. The *Maritzburg Echo* and the *South Coast Sun* need to include survivors of GBV as sources and avoid over-dependency on the police as a legitimate source.

Secondly, with GBV being regarded as a secondary pandemic in South Africa, it will be encouraging to see the publications dedicating more space to GBV-related stories every week, as a lot needs to be done to educate the public on the consequences and impact of GBV on the fiscus, communities and families of both the abused person and perpetrator. Numerous GBV laws have recently been enacted e.g., The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act Amendment Act of 2022, which introduce sexual intimidation as a criminal offence, expand on the list of people to be protected as vulnerable to include women under the age of 25 who are studying and living in student residences; the Domestic Violence Amendment Bill of 2022, which amends the Domestic Violence Act of 1998 to address practical challenges of the Act, expanding the existing definitions such as ‘domestic

violence' to include spiritual abuse, elder abuse, coercive behaviour and controlling behaviours as criminal offence (ALT Advisory, 2022), but the question is, does the public know about such laws? It is therefore recommended for the media to play a pivotal role in educating, explaining and simplifying these laws to the public, informing them on the consequences of transgressing such legislation, and also teaching them how to identify signs of GBV, therefore setting the agenda for their publics to open the discussion of GBV in their communities and households.

Thirdly, there is a growing need to give the GBV survivors a voice and platform to speak on GBV, i.e., using the survivors as sources rather than relying heavily on official sources such as the police to give an account of the cases. Based on Entman's (2006) view on frames and themes, it is recommended that the salience of GBV in the media should improve in terms of giving GBV topics prominence and priority.

Lastly, all GBV-related stories must contain important information such as GBV shelters, police hotline numbers, social workers' contact details, and necessary information on where to seek help when needed, which is not the case in most of the stories published across the three publications under study. The moral obligation of the media should always be to report accurately, in a balanced, and fair manner that does not amount to or cause gratuitous violence and at the same time, the stories posted must be of educational value to the readers, i.e., using effective, correct and stimulating descriptive and emotive words when reporting on social ills such as GBV is recommended. The above-mentioned suggestions might help the three publications move GBV up their agenda.

Recommendations for further research

This study explores how word choice and framing contribute to agenda-setting in reporting GBV in KZN and, by extension, in South African community newspapers. It is therefore recommended that further studies be carried out on the topic to probe and expand the understanding of the usage of certain words with negative or positive connotations and how such words shape the understanding of GBV in South Africa. Secondly, the study does not look at the aspect of audience effect, that is, how the readers comprehend the use of descriptive and emotive words and how such words impact and influence their understanding and interpretation of GBV. Thirdly, additional research needs to be conducted to test the

audience understanding of GBV through the use of descriptive and emotive words or equivalency framing. Fourthly, further research to understand how the relationship between the *Zululand Observer* and *Lifeline* evolved and whether that 'model' is replicable elsewhere with other community newspapers. Further studies need to be carried out on the effects of advertising on editorial material in community newspapers. Finally, further studies need to be conducted to compare the three publications discussed in this study with other community newspapers in other parts of KZN and across South Africa to gauge the reporting ratio of GBV, and how they apply framing and word choice in GBV-related stories.

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Article 1: Zululand Observer “Serial Rapist found guilty on seven charges” (18/02/2022)



Article 2: Zululand Observer “Ulundi woman fatally assaulted with axe” (19/08/2022)



Article 3: Zululand Observer “Cousins lured from their home, raped and killed” (11/03/2022)

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FAMILY WANTS JUSTICE after daughter's murder

LETHWE MAKHANYA
pmbrubble@gmail.com

The Zwane family from Swakobing is demanding justice from the police after their family member, Lethwe Zwane was murdered in death in Grahamstown. According to the family, they were informed by Zwane's boyfriend that she had been stabbed. According to the family, the boyfriend said there that he had stabbed the victim near the road where they were walking towards and he took her to hospital where she later died. The incident happened on March 20, 2021 when Zwane, a family member, told her that she was being followed by a man who would be helpful to check on Zwane but they found her already dead. They then asked the boyfriend if they can see and have a look where the incident happened.

There were no items around the room, but the blood was inside the room and they were running. There was even a knife and blood on top of their head. When the family asked him why there was blood and he said he does not know and he tried to run away but he was apprehended. "He was taken to Philadelphia Police Station where he kept denying that he is the one who stabbed her. He was then arrested on the same day, but we never received any case number," she said. "We said after two days, they discovered shocking news that the suspect had been released and they were never informed as a family. We only found out about his release when we went to hospital where she died and they requested a case number. We went to the police station to ask for it, but we were told that there was no case number and the suspect has been released and they never told us why. The evidence was all there, but he was released. He is walking free as if nothing happened. He is busy harassing the family with phone calls saying that he did not kill her. We feel as if the police justice has failed us. We do not feel safe because he is a friend and we do not know what he might do. We would have arrested so that we can be safe," she said.

She said they have been left with so many questions as to why he was released. "I would like to see the police sergeant who opened and it is under investigation. The result by the boyfriend was released because there was no evidence linking him to the murder."



Lethwe Zwane was stabbed to death. PHOTO: SUPPLIER

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Article 4: Maritzburg Echo "Family wants justice after daughter's murder" (7/04/2022)

Girlfriend stabbed 22 times

LETHIWE MAKHANYA

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Social Development has called on police to make an example of an 18-year-old who allegedly stabbed his girlfriend 22 times in Sweetwaters.

The woman, who was dismembered in the attack, miraculously survived the ordeal. She was so badly injured she had to crawl out of the house to ask for help, holding her intestines in her hand as she made her way out.

She is recovering from the ordeal, having been discharged from hospital. She still has to go regularly to the local clinic for care for her wounds.

The teen had been on the run since the incident happened on October 27, but he was eventually arrested in the early hours of Monday morning.

Plessislaar Police Station spokesperson Sergeant Siso Gwala said the teenager would appear in court soon, where he would be facing a charge of attempted murder.

The girl had been staying at her boyfriend's home in the days leading up to the attack and it was there that the incident took place.

KZN Department of Social Development spokesperson Mhlaba Memela said the department wanted to see the assailant severely punished for the exceptionally brutal assault on his girlfriend.

"We condemn what he did and

It is very concerning because the justice system has not set an example when it comes to cases like this, which is sending the wrong message to the community and the perpetrators.

we do not expect the law to be lenient with him. They must make an example of him and he must be punished," said Memela.

It is recommended that the police prioritise this case because the person has been on the run. They must collect enough evidence that will make sure that he is convicted in court. He needs to be rehabilitated before he can go back into the community.

Memela said it was very concerning that gender-based violence cases continued to rise even though there had been a lot of campaigns and programmes conducted in an effort to curb the scourge.

He said the department would send social workers to help the young woman, whose name is

History of violence

Since the beginning of this year, there have been multiple cases across the country where women were attacked and killed by their boyfriends.

Earlier this year, there was widespread outrage when University of Fort Hare law student Noskelo Mtebeni's dismembered body was discovered inside a bin in a black bag. Her boyfriend, Aluta Pasia, is currently on trial for her murder.

In June, the Capetown Magistrate's Court sentenced Thabiso Ndlovu to 10 years in prison for killing his girlfriend, Thandwe Mavini, by shooting her 12 times. Ndumiso Khumalo, a former Durban Metro Police officer, was sentenced to 20 years behind bars after he shot and killed his girlfriend, Zinhle Muthwa, accusing her of being unfaithful.

In Cape Town, Ruchlan-Kay Lawak was allegedly stabbed to death by her ex-boyfriend last month while sitting next to her two-year-old child.

Nokwanda Mavuya-Patocka from the Eastern Cape died of head injuries after she was strangled, punched and bludgeoned with an object by a man identified by the police as her boyfriend in October. — WR.

known to Echo. He said they would also help her to prepare for the court case.

Plessislaar community policing forum's Sifiso Mavundla applauded the police and the residents of Sweetwaters, who he said gave information about the whereabouts of the teen.

"We are very shocked that someone can do something this cruel to a woman. This person does not deserve to be in the community," he said.

"We hope that the law will do a good job of punishing him and we thank the police for arresting him before he did it to someone else. He must get what he deserves because the way he did it shows that he did it on purpose."

Pietermaritzburg Life Line director Sinkiwe Biyela said it was very sad that there were still people who were suffering such attacks at the hands of people who claimed to love them.

"It is very concerning because the justice system has not set an example when it comes to cases like this, which is sending the wrong message to the community and the perpetrators.

"This makes the perpetrators think that they can do whatever they want and walk free because they know nothing will happen to them.

"You cannot give someone who is capable of doing such [an act] bail," she said.

Biyela called on the justice system to urgently come up with a plan to make cases like this a priority so that perpetrators could be punished.

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Article 5: Maritzburg Echo "Girlfriend stabbed 22 times" (11/11/2021)

Sobantu killer pleads guilty

UKHISENIXUMALO

A violent man who has no respect for women, no empathy, and no mercy. That's how a state prosecutor described Pietermaritzburg man, Ndlou (29), who on Tuesday pleaded guilty to murdering three family members and raping a child (8) in Sobantu.

This, as his statement in support of guilty plea evoked anger, pain, and outrage in court.

Ndlou appeared at the Pietermaritzburg high court and pleaded guilty to three counts of murder and two counts of rape which he committed on Friday, June 22. He admitted to killing nele Emeida Ndlela (65), her daughter Simangeli Ndlela (46), and Simangeli's eight-year-old granddaughter Zanele Ndlela, in their home.

The court also heard that Ndlou had Zanele twice before strangling her to death.

The courtroom was packed with victims, relatives of the victims, and activists who were also joined by the uZulu-Natal Social Development MEC Nonhlanhla Khoza and ANC leader from the Moses Mabhida Region.

When the details of the crimes were revealed before the court, emotions ran high with some family members rushing out of court in tears.

Community members also attempted to manhandle Ndlou while he was the dock and many shouted at him, calling him an animal. Some also faint-

ed inside the court and were assisted by the social workers in court.

The court had to ask these in the public gallery to remain calm.

In his guilty plea, read out in court by advocate Amanda Hulley, Ndlou said on the evening of Sunday June 26, he went to Simangeli's home with his friends. Ndlou said he drank alcohol with his friends, Simangeli and Zanele at their home. "I admit that even though I consumed alcohol on the day in question, I was able to differentiate between right and wrong, and thus act accordingly," he said.

Ndlou said he began flirting with Simangeli and she said that he could sleep over when his friends left her house. Ndlou said his friends left at 1 am the following day and then he and Simangeli went to her bedroom and had consensual sexual intercourse with each other before falling asleep.

He said Zanele came into the bedroom in the early hours of the morning and told him to leave her home or she would hurt him. Ndlou said she left the room after threatening him, "I woke Simangeli up to inform her that her mother wants me to leave the house. Simangeli said I should just ignore her and went back to sleep. Zanele returned and threatened to stab me if I did not listen to her. I ignored Zanele's threats and just remained where I was. Zanele came back a third time and had a kitchen knife in her possession," explained Ndlou.

Ndlou said Zanele pulled the blanket off him and ordered him to leave before she hurt him. He said he got up and went to take the knife away from her. Ndlou grabbed her hand with the knife and they struggled until they fell on the floor and Zanele was under him. He then placed his knee on her neck and took the knife away. "I was angry so I decided to kill her for trying to harm me. I removed my knee and strangled her with my left hand. She continued struggling. I had the knife in my right hand and I used it to stab her once in her neck and once in her left temple above her eye.

"I strangled Zanele until she started foaming from her mouth and became still. Simangeli woke up from the bed and noticed Zanele on the floor. She saw the knife in my hand and asked me what I had done to her mother.

"Simangeli got off the bed and tried to take the knife from me. We struggled and she managed to push me onto the bed. The knife fell on the floor when she pushed me onto the bed. We both grabbed each other by the neck and fought. I managed to push her onto my side and instead of running away, I decided to kill her. I strangled her until she began foaming from her mouth and became still and moved away from her," said Ndlou.

Ndlou said he realized what he had done and he was still naked as he had not got a chance to dress from the time Zanele pulled the blanket off him.

He said Zanele (8) then entered

the bedroom while he was still in the process of trying to figure out what to do. Zanele noticed Ndlou as soon as she entered the bedroom and she saw her lifeless grandmother, Zanele, lying on the floor and her mother, Simangeli, lying on the bed. He said she tried to scream but he covered her mouth to prevent her from screaming.

"She tried to run but I managed to force her onto the floor and she fell on her back. I then strangled her until she became still." He said he raped Zanele twice, and when he was done, he strangled her again, making certain that she was dead. He then got dressed as he could hear people speaking outside the house and he fled the scene.

Ndlou was then arrested on the same day at 9 pm by the police at his home.

"I admitted to committing the offences as I was remorseful for my actions. I am sorry for my actions and regret what I have done," said Ndlou. Hulley asked the court to consider Ndlou's personal circumstances when deciding on sentencing. She said Ndlou has a Diploma in Flight Attendance. Senior state advocate Candy Kander said the manner in which these crimes were committed was a clear indication that Ndlou doesn't deserve to be out in public. She said he deserved the death sentence if it were still applicable. Kander said the injuries and the nature of the crime portray Ndlou as a violent man who has no respect for women, no empathy, and no mercy.

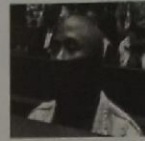


PHOTO: NASH NARRANDES

Njabulo Ndlou (29) pleaded guilty to murdering three family members and raping a child (8) twice, in Sobantu. Pictured sitting behind Ndlou is KwaZulu-Natal Social Development MEC Nonhlanhla Khoza (in red), who joined protesters in condemning the horror murders.

The matter was postponed to next week Thursday for sentencing.

Family was still in disbelief
Speaking outside court, Koani Ndlela said the family was still in disbelief about what Ndlou had done.

He said when the details of how his family members were brutally murdered were revealed in court, it added salt to his bleeding wound.

"I don't wish this on my worst enemy. I do not wish to see him outside walking free and we need the law to play its part. Also, should they fail, they must tell us and release him to us, and we will make a plan. This is too much," said Ndlela.

Ndlela's niece, who found the three lifeless bodies of his family members had collapsed outside the court and was emotional throughout.

Ndlela said they, especially his niece, have been unable to sleep ever since the incident.

• sakhsenixumalo@witness.co.za

Article 6: Maritzburg Echo "Sobantu killer pleads guilty" (14/07/2022)

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BY Vusi Mtshali

Reverend Liezel de Jager is found blood in her yard by her husband, Warren, after returning from her morning jog. She has her hand-to-hand marks on her neck. Her cellphone, handbag and golf bags are found next to her body. The gate is locked. This time they are saying it is covered by the evidence.

October 13, 2021

Reverend Liezel de Jager is found blood in her yard by her husband, Warren, after returning from her morning jog. She has her hand-to-hand marks on her neck. Her cellphone, handbag and golf bags are found next to her body. The gate is locked. This time they are saying it is covered by the evidence.

October 19, 2021

A national service is held to bid farewell to Liezel. Close friends and family pay tribute to her on the M3 Motor, where the solar conspiracy model of her murder is displayed for a virtual ceremony.

October 24, 2021

Liezel's father, Frank van Zyl, reports to the police that Warren is driving after his calls to murder coupled with his own an extended period. A national service is held.

October 27, 2021

Warren is found by an African farmer, who is his son-in-law, in a moment. He is reportedly depressed, and there are some reports that he is not heard to his car. He is arrested by the farmer.

Liezel de Jager murder: a year on



The late Reverend Liezel de Jager of the FET's Mark Tshaba in Johannesburg.

IT HAS been a full year since the murder of Reverend Liezel de Jager of the FET's Mark Tshaba in Johannesburg, and justice has not been served as no arrests have been made since she died.

Liezel, 35, died on the morning of October 13, 2021, at her home on Deon Pienaar Road after returning from jogging with friends. Her husband, Warren de Jager, told the police that he found her dead in the yard of their home. Signs of her possessions were taken as her cellphone, handbag and golf bags were found next to the body.

At the time, provincial police spokesperson Colonel Thembeka Mkhize said Johannesburg police were called to the scene of around 07:00. "I got arrived at the scene, police found a 35-year-old woman victim lying on the ground inside her yard with strangulation marks on the neck," said Mkhize.

A case of murder was registered at Johannesburg police station for investigation, but it was later transferred to District Court, where it apparently has stalled ever since.

Civil rights organisation Action Society has threatened to take steps

against the police for failing to solve the case.

Evolution Peters, who is Action Society's coordinator, has blamed the case's stalled progress on the lack of skills and leadership in the police.

"The complete lack of investigative know-how of local police forces has led to yet another unresolved case, one year after the murder. The case has ground to a halt with no feedback to the family," she said.

She added that Action Society has received a statement from Liezel's family in which they said they had been harassed by the investigation process on the police's side.

"The problem with a case that lingers on and on is that either it gets buried under a heap of never-ending golf bags or it stays the same and it is progressed that far. The intensive DNA testing plays a further role in cases not moving forward," she said.

Provincial police spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nqobile Chabalal said the murder is still under investigation. "We are unable to disclose any further details until the investigation is then passed. We will issue a statement as soon as there is a breakthrough," she said.

November 10, 2021

Heinz van Zyl, the partner of the Free State High Court, Van Zyl claims that the marriage between Warren and Liezel had been troubled for many years. He claims Warren was a danger to himself and others on the road, allegedly attempted suicide in 2016. He also alleges that Liezel believed in every sin besides of supporting the family financially, when Warren was not working, caused a strain on the marriage.

February 24

A case of truth is opened at the Johannesburg District Court after a bicycle is stolen from the Dr. Jager's home. An investigation into the identity of the person, who opened the case, is underway. It is said to be lying in the hands of Warren's father. The gate has remained locked and it is said that the revelation that Warren has moved out of the property.

April 1

Ammanburg SAPS spokesperson Captain Chabalal said the file reveals that the investigation is in cooperation with SAPS. Further investigative work by the police is being done by the Dr. Jager's father, going through the investigation of the case. They are also said to be conducting the CCTV footage that they have been able to access.

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Article 7: South Coast Sun "Liesel de Jager murder: One year on" (21/10/2022)

Double murder shocks Isipingo

BY Vusi Mthalande

RESIDENTS of Mahes Road in Isipingo, made a ghastly discovery on the evening of October 16, when the lifeless bodies of two young women were found abandoned near a warehouse.

According to videos and pictures that have been circulating online, Lee-Ann Jaers (30) and her niece, Ashly Jaers (18) were found undressed, with one having a wound to the temple and the other one with what appeared

to be strangulation marks on her neck.

The women are believed to have been killed elsewhere and dumped at Jeena's warehouses' parking lot. They were found one on top of the other. They both resided on Mohan Road, in Isipingo, not far from where they were found.

Provincial SAPS spokesperson, Lieutenant Colonel Nqobile Gwala, said police responded to the scene at 19:15. Two cases of murder were opened at the Isipingo police station.

KwaZulu-Natal Social Development MEC, Nonhlanhla Khoza, has called on law enforcement agencies to thoroughly investigate the double murder.

"As a society, we need to play our role in exposing the perpetrators and ensure that all those involved in such cases are brought to book and punished accordingly. We should not rest until the perpetrators are found and arrested.

"They should be given lengthy jail sentences in order to send a strong message that, as the province, we are intolerant of the abuse of women," said Khoza.

She confirmed that she has dispatched a team of social workers to offer psycho-social support to the victims' families.

Gwala has appealed to anyone who might have information about the suspects involved to contact their nearest police station or Crime Stop on 08600 10111.

Lee-Ann Jaers was found murdered with her niece in Isipingo.



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Article 8: South Coast Sun "Double murder shocks Isipingo" (21/10/2022)

Man stands trial for double murder

By Vusi Mihalane

A FUGITIVE wanted for a double murder and auto theft was arrested in the Bluff on Tuesday, June 14, after the car he allegedly stole was found abandoned in Amanzimtoti.

Shane Boucher, 58, is suspected of stabbing and bludgeoning a 75-year-old woman and her 58-year-old daughter to death in Pietermaritzburg last month. Excellent detective skills from a police officer, who noticed the man's suspicious body language and lack of eye contact while at a store in Bluff led to the arrest.

Detective Captain Errol Varley from Brighton Beach SAPS Detective Services visited a local food store and noticed Boucher's strange body language as he entered the store.

Varley was chatting with a colleague from SAPS Arwing, Warrant Officer Riaan van Zyl, at the entrance of the store when Boucher, dressed in a hoodie covering his head and wearing a face mask, lowered his head and prevented eye contact as he walked past the two police officers, dressed in uniform.

His strange body language was suspicious and prompted Varley to follow the man into the convenience store while Van Zyl guarded the entrance. Varley followed the suspect as he walked through the store, and approached him at the cash point. Varley identified him as the same suspect whose information was circulated internally and was sought for a double murder in Pietermaritzburg in May this year. Boucher was arrested and taken to Brighton Beach SAPS, said the communications officer of the Brighton Beach SAPS, Captain Lesine le Roux.

After contacting the investigating officer dealing with the double murder, Varley further established that Boucher had stolen a Chevrolet Spark motor vehicle, which was recovered in the Amanzimtoti area, about a week before his arrest.

KZN police spokesperson, Constable Thenjiswa

Shane Boucher is standing trial for the murder of an elderly woman and her daughter.

Ngcobo, confirmed that on Thursday, May 26, at 19:45, the bodies of a 75-year-old woman and her 58-year-old daughter were found at their house at Orby Village in Pietermaritzburg.

"They were allegedly stabbed with a sharp instrument at the back of their heads. Nothing was taken inside the house except the vehicle that was stolen. The suspect appeared at the Pietermaritzburg Magistrate's Court on Monday, June 20, for murder, robbery, and theft of a motor vehicle and he was remanded in custody," said Ngcobo.



Hijackings spike in Toti

ANUMBER of vehicles have been recovered in Amanzimtoti and the surrounds after a sudden increase in hijackings and car thefts over the past few weeks.

One of the incidents resulted in the death of Dalton Hobbs, 24, who was shot and killed in the CBD after hijackers pointed a gun at him and made away with his Toyota Prado on June 3.

On Sunday, June 12, a Ford Ranger bakkie that had been stolen from Park Estate was recovered in the Amanzimtoti area after police responded to information about the incident that had been relayed on the Community Crime Prevention Organisation Amanzimtoti's (CCPO) radio network.

On Wednesday, June 9, a BMW sedan that had been stolen from a car wash in Phoenix was recovered in Wankwankent.

On Tuesday, June 8, two cars were recovered by police after a hijacking and a theft. In Donsdale, a driver of a Renault

Scania was hijacked at gaspoint on Beach Road.

A few hours later in the evening, a Toyota Etios was stolen in Amanzimtoti.

Amanzimtoti SAPS spokesperson, Captain Charlton van der Spuy, said motorists must examine their chances of being targets of hijacking.

"If you suspect that you are being followed, drive to the nearest police station or call the SAPS emergency number 10111. Avoid being alone in a vehicle when travelling at night, and do not stop around hijacking spots or at any isolated area," she said.

Picking up bin liners, particularly when driving alone, also increases the risk.

"Avoid distractions such as being on your phone, drinking and driving. Increase caution at intersections. Always keep a look out for people loitering around your car or for any sudden activity around your car," said Van der Spuy.

To read more visit www.southcoastsun.co.za

Article 9: South Coast Sun "Man stands trial for double murder" (24/06/2022)